



THE SCORPION

BY THE AUTHOR OF
THE RAVEN'S FEATHERS



THE SCORPION

A Limehouse Mystery

by

DOUGLAS CAREY



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THE SCORPION

PROLOGUE

Li Ying Hua bowed obsequiously before the distinguished visitor who descended from the taxi at the door of his establishment in Canton Street, one of the smaller thoroughfares branching from the Limehouse Causeway. The visitor condescended towards Li, named by his parents 'Son of the Moon', in a manner befitting his dignity, for was he not Kwong Heisu, High Priest of Buddha of the Scorpions, in the Central Chinese Province of Shensi?

Li Ying Hua's establishment was hardly worthy of such an honour, being an opium den of notoriously unsavoury repute, an unlikely place for a High Priest of Buddha of any description to visit; yet, so impatient was he to interview Li Ying Hua, Kwong Heisu had not waited for the turn of the tide which would enable the P. & O. liner on which he had voyaged to pass inside the East India Docks, but had disembarked immediately the vessel was moored in the river outside, being one of the first passengers to set foot on shore.

His dignity had but little effect on Li's idle neighbours, who, stolid and indifferent, had watched the approach of the taxi. This was Limehouse, London, and not Shensi, of Central China. To them it was nothing that he might

have carried the insignia of Mandarinship, that he was elderly, or that his face, disfigured by an oblique sacrificial scar across each cheekbone, gave indication of his own consciousness of spiritual power.

Li, however, for the moment chose to pander to this very evident self-consciousness.

"The humble abode of myself the Low One is honoured in again welcoming the Illustrious Voice of Buddha the Most High," he said.

Kwong Heisu did not reply until he had crossed the threshold. Then he said abruptly: "You tell me, O Son of the Moon, that you have the information I seek."

"But three moons have passed since the men the Exalted One seeks returned to this city of pigs," Li Ying Hua replied. "With the assistance of one who is to be trusted I have found them and their abodes."

Kwong Heisu's lips curled in a snarling smile to indicate his pleasure at this. "For years I have sought them without success, my faithful Li. Now I shall have them in my hands," he said, his manner of speaking being but a further expression of a hatred which was unquenchable, except by the death of those he sought, and for which purpose he had come.

That hatred had endured since the period of the Boxer Rising. Kwong Heisu, one of the leaders in that Rising in the District of Shensi, had instigated the pillaging and burning of the Roman Catholic Mission at Wei-Hai, twenty miles distant from his own diocese. He had returned to discover that during his absence other pillagers had been at

work. The temple of Buddha had been sacked by infidels . . . white men . . . one of whom had remained, a victim of the scorpions, and deserted for dead by his four companions. From him, before he died, Kwong Heisu had learned the names of the others, who had carried away many valuable jewels, including the 'Light of Buddha', a blood diamond of great size.

In his quest to recover the 'Light of Buddha' he had travelled the world over, establishing outposts in all the principal cities, without telling them of the reason of his search. Enough for them that he was a Buddhist High Priest, with power to damn their eternal souls. Also, he was afraid of disclosing the value of the diamond to treacherous spies, besides wishing to make sure personally that the marauders received to the full the punishment he had devised as fitting their sacrilege, ignoring both the nature of his own errand at the time the temple was despoiled, and the fact that he had previously laid in ruins the plantations which these men owned.

Li Ying Hua, with the admitted assistance of another spy, had at last located them in London. Word from him had brought Kwong Heisu, thirsting for vengeance, again to London with the promptest despatch.

Passing through the restaurant which comprised Li Ying Hua's legitimate business, he followed the proprietor into a second apartment which was empty. Looking around suspiciously, he said: "Tell me, and lie not! Are we alone?"

"There is no one here but Ho Ling, whose right hand is mine, and the servant of the Illustrious One," Li answered. "Upstairs is one whose means of obtaining information is

great. He it is of whom I spoke to the Holy One of Buddha. Sometimes he comes to smoke a pipe for the comfort of his soul. He now awaits his reward for discovering the pigs the High and Mighty One hates."

"You have known already why I hate them, O Son of the Moon," the Buddhist said. "Now it is time for you to know that hatred alone is not the cause of my journeying across the waters. I will confide in thee now, but think not to use the information for any unworthy purpose of thine own. The Great Buddha of the Scorpions has given me the power of life and death. If you betray me, I have but to speak."

There was dominant virility in the eyes scanning Li's. They were the eyes of one accustomed to control by magnetic force. Before them Li Ying Hua permitted himself to quail, and Kwong Heisu, arrogant in his conceit, read in this quailing what he expected to read. But when he sought to penetrate into the abysses of Li's mind he failed, for Li's face was a mask of inscrutability. Nevertheless, as he cringed before the High Priest, he pleaded: "O Excellent, Exalted, Illustrious One! I am the servant of thy servant's servant!"

Satisfied, into his ears Kwong Heisu whispered the value of the 'Light of Buddha', at which his auditor exclaimed in indignation: "The illegitimate orphans of pigs! Let thy servant but recover the diamond and exterminate the swine!"

"The privilege of their extermination is mine," Kwong Heisu said fiercely. "You may assist me, Li, Son of the Moon, and the reward shall be great. Listen, and I will tell thee of the way they shall know the terror that is at their heels!"

Li's narrow slits of eyes dilated in eager anticipation as he detailed his plan. "When I am in their houses, I shall wear the mask of my High Priesthood, which they will recognize," Kwong Heisu was saying. "And when the first dies the death of the scorpion, it shall terrify those who remain."

Li Ying Hua raised one objection. "The scorpions, Most Righteous One! How shall you obtain them?"

"I have told you it is already prepared," Kwong Heisu answered abruptly. "To my shame I admit that I was doubtful of getting them through the Customs, but the ways of Buddha the Great God are wonderful. He it was who compelled the receding of the waters to cause the vessel to be moored outside the docks for several hours. In one hour, when darkness covers the earth, we shall row a boat from here to the vessel. A sailor of our beloved country, who is my servant, will slip quietly over the side, and swim to us with the box containing the scorpions."

"But the police boats . . . !"

"Are you worse than an infidel, possessing no faith?" Kwong Heisu silenced him. Yet the next moment he expressed his own doubts in a manner which belied his faith. "If I am traced here," he questioned, "are you sure the way of escape we discussed before is still available?"

Li Ying Hua hastened to reassure him. "From the room the Mighty One will occupy there is still the secret passage connecting with the abodes of the trustworthy Loy Soo and Fung Tsueh, to the storehouse of merchandise on the wharf, or, if necessary, there is always the great sewer."

"It is well, O Son of the Moon," Kwong Heisu said.

"Now I will see the servant of whom you spoke, and pay him his reward."

"The reward can wait," Li replied. "He is doubtless asleep from the pipe, and it is possible his services can again be employed. He has a means of coming and going which would be barred to us."

"I am satisfied," Kwong Heisu said. But he added, as a precaution: "You are sure of his trustworthiness, Son of the Moon?"

"As I know the secrets of my own heart," Li answered.

"Then you can deal with him. In one hour I shall return from the abode of Fung Tsueh by the secret passage. See that you attend my coming."

Li Ying Hua spat contemptuously at the door as it closed behind Kwong Heisu. Immunity in crime had deadened his fear of any and all the Buddhas. Kwong Heisu had spoken of his power of life and death. Li preferred to trust to the dirk he touched beneath his kimono. If necessary, he could strike with greater rapidity than the other could speak. Besides, he was the servant and accomplice of another whose power was as great as Kwong Heisu's, none other than the occupant of a smoking bunk upstairs, to which Li rapidly ascended.

"It is well, Master," he said, with much enthusiasm. "I was sure there was more than vengeance to account for Kwong Heisu's flights across the waters. There is a diamond worth half a million!"

"Let me hear all that was said!" The person addressed as 'Master' was brief.

"If the Master wishes," Li Ying Hua finished his recital,

"Kwong Heisu can disappear from the boat as we return with the scorpions. They are . . ."

"We need to learn more of his proposed methods with them, the other interrupted him. "Why should not the hand of Kwong Heisu be accountable for the crimes, while we reap the reward?"

"The Master is wiser than his servant," Li Ying Hua became obsequious again. "It is too great a privilege even to be the Master's servant."





THE SCORPION
CHAPTER I
ON THE TRAIL OF THE DIAMOND



CHAPTER I

ON THE TRAIL OF THE DIAMOND

N EWSBOYS were shouting vociferously outside Paddington Station as Inspector Dalgleish, of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard, turned his car into Baker Street, Marylebone. He listened to them without paying any special heed until, his car stopped by a traffic signal, one of them jumped on to the running board and thrust a paper through the window.

"Hextry speshul! Millionaire murdered! All about the murder, sir . . . paiper!"

The inspector glanced at the headline pushed in front of his eyes and read:

ATROCIOUS MURDER IN BURLINGTON ARCADE!

Becoming interested, he took the news sheet as he felt for a coin in his pocket. The Burlington Arcade came within his own special radius.

"It was in the Burlington Apartments, sir!" the news-boy volunteered as, having received the penny, he jumped clear of the car. "Richard Anthony was the bloke's name, sir. Only discovered half an hour ago!"

That explained why the Yard had not communicated with him by phone before he left his home in the northern suburbs. Before he had had time to scan the meagre column concerning the tragedy, the traffic signal turned. Putting the paper on the seat beside him, he stepped on the accelerator. He would have to go first to Scotland Yard and report, and there he would obtain the true known facts of the case.

In spite of the early hour, Sir Basil Coyne was already there, awaiting the arrival of Inspector Dalglish at headquarters.

"We tried to get you on the phone, Dalglish, but you had left," the Chief informed him. "This Anthony affair . . have you heard anything about it?"

"I saw the headline in this paper I bought in Baker Street, but didn't stop to read the account, sir," Dalglish answered.

"I can't understand how the paper got hold of it," Sir Basil grumbled. "Anthony's valet said he did no more than phone here. As it is, the newspaper account is very superficial, according to what I have since learned from Sergeant Brooks."

"Then Brooks is already on the job?"

"Yes. I had to send someone. Brooks, of your own squad, was here, so I sent him. His instructions were merely to take charge, and not allow anything to be touched before you got there, as this is too big a job for him to handle alone."

"What does Brooks say about it, sir?" Dalglish asked.

"It has the earmarks of a mystery," Sir Basil answered. "Brooks phoned in to say the case looks very peculiar. The

murdered man, Richard Anthony, from his appearance, might have died from fright . . either that, or strangled himself in a nightmare. His hand is gripped round his own throat."

"Then the supposition of murder . . . "

"The bedroom and the library adjoining were ransacked. Safe open, bureau drawers turned inside out . . not a stitch of clothing, apparently, left unsearched. Whether he died before or after the burglary, if anything was actually taken, needs yet to be discovered. You had better get straight down there," the Chief added. "Dr. Gleason's car and the ambulance left just before you came in."

It took the inspector exactly five minutes to get from Whitehall to the Burlington Arcade. The police ambulance and the private car of the Criminal Pathologist pulled in at the kerb just ahead of him. Several policemen were busy preventing the congestion of a curious crowd, through the stragglers of which Dr. Gleason and the inspector pushed their way.

"But for a traffic jamb I would have beaten you by a short head this time, Dalgleish," Dr. Gleason remarked. He knew the inspector regarded it almost as a point of honour to be the first on the scene of a crime.

Dalgleish made a good-humoured reply. They had worked together too often to allow of any real feeling of professional rivalry between them.

Two policemen were guarding the door of Richard Anthony's spacious nine-roomed apartment. They saluted the officials, and one of them opened the door. The dead man's valet was waiting in the hall inside, and he conducted them

to the bedroom, where Detective-Sergeant Brooks had remained.

The bedroom had the appearance of having been hit by a cyclone. The contents of dresser drawers and wardrobes were scattered all over the floor. There was no sign of a struggle, however. The nightmare theory which had appealed to Sergeant Brooks seemed, but for the litter through which they waded, to fit the case. Richard Anthony's face was ghastly, with a ghastliness not only of death. The expression on it, with its open, staring eyes, was one of extreme terror. The bed apparently had not been disturbed, and, as Brooks had reported to headquarters, the occupant's hand was clutched round his own throat.

"Is this exactly how you found things, Brooks?" Dalglish questioned.

"Yes, sir. And his valet here, Tomkins, says he touched nothing before he phoned the Yard."

"Nor since," Tomkins added.

"It's a funny idea, but it has been growing on me all the time," Brooks went on.

"What is?" Dalglish asked him.

"It looks as if he had been hunting for something he couldn't find, and then got into bed and strangled himself."

"Didn't you report that the safe had been forced?"

"Not forced, no. I haven't examined it closely, but it doesn't look like it. If it wasn't opened by someone who knew the combination, it was by an expert crook to whom a combination lock means nothing."

Observing the glance Dalglish sent in the direction of Tomkins, Brooks added: "Tomkins had a rambling story

about a nightmare, too. Kind of mixed-up affair. I couldn't make head nor tail of it."

"According to the mess here, with better reason than the other probably," the inspector replied to the first sentence. Tomkins he asked: "Where do you sleep?"

"In there, sir," the valet pointed to one of the three doors leading from the bedroom.

"Was Mr. Anthony in the habit of throwing things around like this?"

"He was inclined to be a bit excited at times, sir. He had somewhat of a nervous temperament."

"So that, apart from thinking you had had a nightmare, you wouldn't take any notice of a little disturbance such as he might create?" the inspector's tone was sarcastic.

"I didn't hear any of it, sir," Tomkins answered. "I didn't hear any commotion at all."

"You're not deaf, are you?"

"No, sir."

"And you don't exactly die when you go to sleep?"

"I can always hear Mr. Anthony if he calls . . . or I could," Tomkins became a trifle indignant.

"Then how do you account for not hearing anything?"

"I can't explain it, unless what happened to me was not really a nightmare after all. It was like a nightmare, only instead of falling down and down, I was going up and up. And I didn't wake up with a start when I hit the roof. I was still asleep."

"That's all I could get out of him," Brooks remarked.

"Sounds something like chloroform," Dr. Gleason suggested, "but there would still be some of it around."

"I would have known the smell of chloroform, sir," Tomkins said. "And I wasn't sick, like I was once when I had an operation."

"You wouldn't suggest that you were drugged in some other way?" Dalgleish questioned.

"I think that must have been what happened to me, sir." Tomkins's answer was quick, almost eager. It was that eagerness that made his response look suspicious, as if he were clutching at the chance of an alibi. Dalgleish chose to look at it in that light. His next remark was intended to give the man another yard or two of rope.

"Perhaps you can describe the person who administered the drug?" he suggested.

"Not exactly. But there was someone bending over me . . . a man with his face hidden in something like the pictures of the Ku Klux Klan; I think they call it, sir. I have a vague impression that it might have been a Chinese mask."

"He didn't tell me anything like that, sir," Brooks interposed indignantly.

"Yes," said Dalgleish, subjecting Tomkins to a keen scrutiny, "I am wondering why he kept such a choice piece of information for me."

"It is only in the last five minutes that I remembered anything about it," Tomkins said hurriedly.

"A remarkable coincidence," the inspector's tone was sarcastic. "I suppose my suggestion about being drugged helped your memory tremendously. Is that it?"

"It may be; but if you think I am manufacturing a statement to clear myself . . ." Tomkins was visibly annoyed, but not confused.

"We'll look at that later," Dalglish interrupted him. "But tell me this! You are not in the habit of dreaming about Chinamen, are you?"

"Certainly not. There's no reason why I should be. I have never had any dealings with them."

"Perhaps Mr. Anthony had?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"You never saw any Chinamen here before?"

"No. Mr. Anthony may have had some connection with China, though. He has travelled all over the world. There are Chinese curios in some of the rooms, the sort of things people pick up for ornaments; but, as I say, there are things from everywhere."

"Suppose we come back to this later," Dr. Gleason suggested to the inspector. Such details were not within his province. "Let's have a look at the body."

They approached the bed, and Inspector Dalglish threw back the coverings. Still there was no sign of a struggle of any kind. The body was stretched out as it might have been in sleep. The arm and hand covering the throat were rigid, but Dr. Gleason took hold of the wrist and jerked it away. Instantly both he and the inspector stepped backwards. Beneath the hand was a dead scorpion, apparently suffocated, and between four and five inches in length!

"There's something in this Chinaman theory after all!" Dr. Gleason exclaimed, recovering immediately from his surprise. "That creature is the size of a full-grown scorpion as they are found in the Central Provinces of China!"

"Would it have killed him?" Dalglish asked.

"I can't tell you until I go into it farther," Dr. Gleason answered.

"It wouldn't cause instant death?"

"Hardly; but what are you thinking?"

"The expression on his face doesn't suggest it," Dalgleish answered. "And if not, why should he have put his hand on the scorpion to hold it there instead of throwing it off?"

"That is exactly what was in my own mind," Dr Gleason returned. "I believe," he added quietly, but loud enough for the inspector to hear, "that we have found substantiation of what Tomkins said. Whoever it was he now remembers he saw, the sensation he described might have been provoked by a skilful hypnotist, while the expression on Anthony's face suggests that terror, inspired by someone of whom he was mortally afraid, was mainly responsible for his death. In that case the masked Chinaman, or whoever it was, could scarcely have existed solely in the servant's imagination. But, as I say, that is your concern, not mine; so I think I'll take the body away for the postmortem, and leave you to your own investigations."

Inspector Dalgleish went to the door and called in the two policemen who were outside. As they carried the body out he instructed them: "Come back to the door as soon as you have put him into the ambulance." Then, motioning to Tomkins to follow, he and Sergeant Brooks went into the library.

The library was in the same condition of turmoil as the bedroom. Everything indicated a search for something which might have been hidden. As Brooks had suggested, a casual glance at the safe was sufficient to reveal that it

had been opened in the ordinary way. Dalglish turned again to the servant, and questioned him: "You can't think of anything which might have been the motive for this, or the murder?"

"Nothing at all."

"Did you know the combination of the safe?"

"Nobody but Mr. Anthony knew that, sir," Tomkins answered nervously, terrified again at a question that seemed to implicate himself. "He always opened it himself."

"But you have seen it opened?"

"Quite often . . . yes, sir. Mr. Anthony never used to bother about my being in the library when he opened it."

"Then perhaps you have some idea of what it contained?"

"Not worth mentioning, sir. I was never any closer to it than I am now when it was open."

"Mr. Anthony never mentioned anything . . . any paper . . . which it might interest another person to get?"

"He never talked to me about his private concerns. I was his valet, not his secretary."

"Then he had a secretary?"

"No. I merely remarked that I didn't fill such a position."

"Well, in future just answer my questions without supplying caustic suggestions of your own," Dalglish admonished him severely. He continued: "Who does the work of the establishment, apart from yourself?"

"Two maids," Tomkins told him. "They should be here soon. They usually arrive at 8.30. I have been accustomed to getting breakfast for Mr. Anthony myself."

"Then they don't sleep here?"

"No, sir. At night there was never anyone here except

Mr. Anthony and me. Mr. Anthony would not hear of women sleeping in the apartment. They leave in the evening after all the dinner things are washed and put away."

"At what time is that?"

"Around nine o'clock."

"They left at the same time last night?"

"As near as I can say, sir. I don't always see them go."

"You mean, you are not in the habit of staying in the kitchen with them?"

"That's about the last thing Mr. Anthony would have permitted, sir."

"Then this Chinaman you speak about may have been in the apartment since then?"

"Not unless they let him in. There's only one way to get in besides the front door . . . that is the back entrance. And it is impossible to open that from the outside."

"Why?"

"It is arranged for a fire escape as well, and opens on the safety push bar principle."

"Where does that door lead to?" indicating.

"Into the corridor. All the rooms on this side have doors opening into it. It leads direct to the fire escape."

"I've got two men guarding the back door," Brooks observed.

Dalglish continued interrogating the servant. "Are you responsible for all the windows at night, Tomkins?"

"Absolutely. I examine them all before I turn in."

"You can't think of any you might have missed?"

"I do it methodically, sir."

"All right. What other rooms are there?"

"Besides Mr. Anthony's bedroom and this, the library, there are seven others," Tomkins answered. "My room and his dressing-room are off his bedroom. Next to this is the dining-room, with a spare bedroom off that. Next again is the kitchen, with the maids' bedroom — which is of course never used — and the pantry. The bathroom, behind the wall there, is accessible from Mr. Anthony's dressing-room, the spare room, and the kitchen."

"Three doors to it?"

"No, only one. It's off another corridor."

The inspector had been examining the knob of the safe combination with a lens. He startled Tomkins with: "Come here, Tomkins! Let me see your right hand!"

Tomkins crossed the room to him. Dalglish took his hand and compared his finger marking with some impressions which were visible on the knob.

"You surely don't think, sir . . !" the servant stammered.

"I'm looking for facts, not merely thinking," the inspector replied somewhat tersely. He added, however, in a more lenient manner: "These finger-prints let you out, Tomkins. I am inclined to believe that what you said about not knowing the safe combination was correct. What is it?" he turned to the policeman who had entered.

"Two women here, sir. Say they're servants to Mr. Anthony," the constable answered.

"Send them in!"

The two maids entered, clinging affrightedly to each other.

"They say there's been a 'orrible murder, sir," the elder one stuttered. "I was afraid to come in, but Mary here said

we'd better come in case the police wanted to ask us any questions."

"Quite right, too," the inspector answered. "You may have saved us and yourselves a lot of bother. Tomkins says you left at about nine o'clock last night. Is that correct?"

"Quite correct, sir. We always go then together, don't we, Mary?"

"Yes indeed, sir," Mary corroborated.

"You didn't let anyone in before you left?"

"Why, of course not, sir!"

"You didn't see anyone hanging around?"

"No one as you could call suspicious-looking," Mary said.

"How long have you been employed by Mr. Anthony?"

"Just four months, sir."

He made a note of their names and addresses, and let them go. He asked Tomkins: "How long have you been valet to Mr. Anthony?"

"The same time, sir . . . four months. That was when he first took up residence here."

"Do you know if he was living in London before that?"

"I think he came from abroad, sir."

"What makes you think that?"

"He had bought several new trunks, sir; and the labels on them said Vera Cruz," Tomkins informed him.

THE SCORPION

CHAPTER II

WHY TOMKINS?

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WHY TOMKINS?

INSPECTOR Dalglish and Sergeant Brooks continued their search of the library and bedroom for further clues, without any result of consequence. In the bedroom, however, they discovered the scorpion where Dr. Gleason had put it. Evidently he had forgotten to take it with him. It was Brooks who saw it first, and he drew the inspector's attention to it.

"Better not touch it if you don't have to," Dalglish replied. "We'll have to take it with us when we go."

Later: "It's not of much use wasting time here. We'll try to find out how he got in. You take the back half of the suite, Brooks, and I'll attend to the front."

Brooks had hardly departed when Dalglish, glancing towards Tomkins, observed that the man's face had become ghastly.

"What is it?" he asked him quickly.

"I don't think I was drugged at all," Tomkins faltered.

"You don't, eh? Why not?"

"I believe I was hypnotized, sir."

"What makes you think that?" Dalglish queried, wondering if the man had heard Dr. Gleason speak of that possibility.

"Things are becoming clearer in my mind, sir," the servant answered. "I can see the man . . . bending over me again. He was speaking to me. I can almost remember the voice."

"You said he was Chinese," Dalglish reminded him.

"There was a hideous Chinese face drawn on the mask, sir. My God! It was horrible! Would you mind, sir, if I went to get a drink?"

"No. Go and get one. You look as if you need it. But don't touch anything except the water tap and a glass. Let me know immediately you remember anything more definite."

Tomkins staggered towards the kitchen. Two or three minutes perhaps had elapsed, when there came a muffled cry from the kitchen. Rushing from the bathroom, Dalglish arrived at the same moment as Brooks appeared at the pantry door. Both stopped abruptly, their gaze focussed on Tomkins. He was writhing in a death agony on the floor.

"The masked Chinaman is . . . !" the valet managed to gasp. But that was all he could say. With a horrible convulsion he stretched himself out at their feet, a corpse!

"Look at his hand, clutching his throat like Anthony's was!" Brooks exclaimed.

"And look at the reason!" Dalglish pointed.

The black claw of a scorpion was pushing its way from beneath the dead man's fingers.

Brooks rushed to the bedroom, and came back with the information that the dead scorpion was gone.

"That's funny! It was there the last I saw it," Dalglish said. "Wonder where it went. This can't be the

same one, for the damned thing couldn't come to life. And this one is alive. You can see the claw moving."

"Perhaps he was going to say the Chinaman is still here," Brooks suggested.

"If so, he must yet be here . . . unless he got through a window."

"If he did that, he would have to jump. I went outside just now to look for ladder heel marks, and there was no sign of a ladder anywhere."

"Then you found a window forced?" Dalglish asked him.

"No. But I thought, if he came in that way, he could easily close it again before he went out by the fire escape."

"Those men are still on the doors?"

"Yes. Two at each end."

Enquiry at the front door cleared up the mystery of the first scorpion's disappearance. "Dr. Gleason came back for something he said he had forgotten," the policemen told the inspector.

"When was that?" Dalglish queried, wondering why he had not seen him.

"It's only a few minutes ago he left, sir," one of the constables answered.

"One of you stay here, and don't open the door for anyone, either in or out, without express word from me! The other come with me!" the inspector instructed sharply.

"Stay here with Sergeant Brooks," he said to the man who entered. Then he hurried along the corridor to the fire escape.

"Nobody has been through this door except Sergeant Brooks," the men on guard there answered his question.

He gave one of them the same instructions, and took the other with him, back to Sergeant Brooks. To him he said: "If that Chinaman is still here, we've got to ferret him out. You take one man. Start at the fire escape, and work back through the apartment. I'll work with the other from the front door."

The two parties met again in the kitchen. There was no need for either question or answer. Neither had met with any result, and their faces showed it.

Meanwhile, the second scorpion was still working its way from beneath the dead hand of Tomkins. Its head and both claws were now visible.

"That thing is going to be free in no time," Dalglish said, half suppressing a shudder.

"Watch me pick it up . . . I don't think!" Brooks returned.

"Nobody had better touch it," Dalglish replied. "Dr. Gleason may not like it, but the only safe thing is to kill it before it does any more damage. Stand clear while I lift his hand!"

Released, the scorpion made one jump of several inches, and then stood with its tail raised in defiance. One of the policemen put his foot on it promptly. When he lifted his heavy boot, there was a sticky mess on the floor.

"This beats everything," Brooks remarked, as they stood looking at one another in perplexity.

"The Chinaman couldn't have dematerialized," Dalglish said.

"Whatever that is," Brooks replied vaguely.

"Vanished into thin air, like David Devant's disappearing ghost," Dalgleish elucidated.

"I've seen that myself at Maskelyne and Devant's," one of the constables observed.

"Yes, at a Hall of Mystery, where they've got all kinds of machinery to help them," the inspector said, with sarcasm. "But a stunt like that couldn't be pulled off here. I've been suspicious of this fellow's story about the masked Chinaman, nightmares, and being hypnotized."

"When did he say that?" Brooks enquired.

"After you left us in the bedroom. Said he was just beginning to remember, and looked pretty sickly over it. Like a fool, I let him get out of my sight. When we get to the bottom of this, I think we'll find there's something peculiar in which both of them were implicated. The way both of them died clutching a scorpion at their throats looks fishy enough to be smelt a mile from Billingsgate. Damned peculiar way to commit suicide, though."

"That looks doubtful, too," Brooks observed. He was again bending over the body of the servant. "He would hardly gag himself with his other hand."

"What's that?"

Inspector Dalgleish approached for a closer inspection. There were the impressions of four finger tips on the dead man's cheeks!

Dalgleish straightened himself up. He spoke savagely. "We've got to get to the bottom of this, Brooks. If it *was* the Chinaman, he's still here, hiding somewhere where we can't find him . . . yet. You are sure you didn't miss any corners?"

"Absolutely. There weren't any corners to miss."

"And the windows were all still fastened?"

"Every one."

The inspector thought for a moment, then he said: "Stay here a minute, Brooks!" To one constable: "Go and stay by the fire escape . . . inside!" To the other: "You remain inside the hall door!"

To Brooks, he added: "I'm going to telephone to find out who was the architect of this building, and get him here with his blue prints. In that way we'll find out if there have been any alterations . . . secret closets . . . made. Shout, any of you, if anything happens."

First, however, he phoned Scotland Yard.

"Inspector Dalglish speaking. Is Dr. Gleason there?"

"He's just gone over to the morgue."

"Get hold of him and send him back. There's another case. Is Sir Basil Coyne in his office?"

"No, Inspector. He went out a little while ago."

"Ask him to call Mayfair 2700 when he comes in. It's important. Meantime, send over nine men, pronto!"

"Nine men, you said?"

"Yes. There are nine rooms here, and some mysterious disappearing going on. I want a man in every room."

The nine men arrived very quickly. They were barely posted when Dr. Gleason arrived too.

"What's this you say about another case?" he asked.

The inspector took him to the kitchen.

"The valet!" the doctor exclaimed.

"Right under our noses," Dalglish said disgustedly.

"Brooks was out at the fire escape somewhere. I was in

the bathroom. We both heard him cry out, and came to find him here. He was nearly dead then. All he could say was to start something about the mysterious Chinaman again."

"How did it happen?"

"Another scorpion."

"There was, eh? Where is it?"

Dalglish explained. "We thought it was the one you left in the bedroom," he added, "especially as that one had disappeared."

"He came back to fetch it," Dr. Gleason replied. "I didn't see either of you around, and did not bother to find you."

"We heard that," Dalglish told him. "Besides, we knew it couldn't be that one, because the second one was alive. Incredible as it may seem, I believe that Chinaman is still hiding here somewhere."

"And you've discovered no trace of him . . . beyond the second scorpion?"

"None whatever, and we've searched every cubby-hole there is. Before Brooks spotted those marks on his cheek, I thought it was a clear case of suicide. To make matters worse, those marks were apparently made by the same hand that left the finger-prints on the knob of the safe!"

"It's a pity you didn't keep the second scorpion," Dr. Gleason said.

"Why?"

"Because it wasn't the scorpion alone that killed him. No scorpion, however poisonous, could kill a man as quickly as that."

"You thought the other one killed Anthony, didn't you?" The inspector was surprised.

"I haven't had time to examine him yet," Dr. Gleason answered. "I came straight from the Yard immediately I received your message. In this case the scorpion was the instrument, not the direct cause of death."

"How do you mean?" Dalglish asked him.

"You see these marks on his throat," the Pathologist explained. "These are the marks of the claws. The purple blotches indicate that that is how the poison that killed him was introduced. There is no poison in a scorpion's claws. The only venom it has is in its tail, and that it uses to paralyze, not to kill. There is no indication that its tail touched his throat at all. His hand would stop it, which may explain why both their hands were rigid at their throats . . . paralyzed temporarily."

"Then it's fortunate no one tried to pick it up," Dalglish declared hotly. "Or you might have another post-mortem on the way."

"You may be right," Dr. Gleason said. "I hadn't considered that possibility. And there may be the same indications in the case of Anthony, when I come to look for them."

Dr. Gleason took the body away as the architect came in. Dalglish stayed with the latter thirty minutes, and they spent the whole of that time checking over the apartment inch by inch. It tallied exactly with the original drawings; neither was there sufficient space between any two walls to allow for a place of concealment.

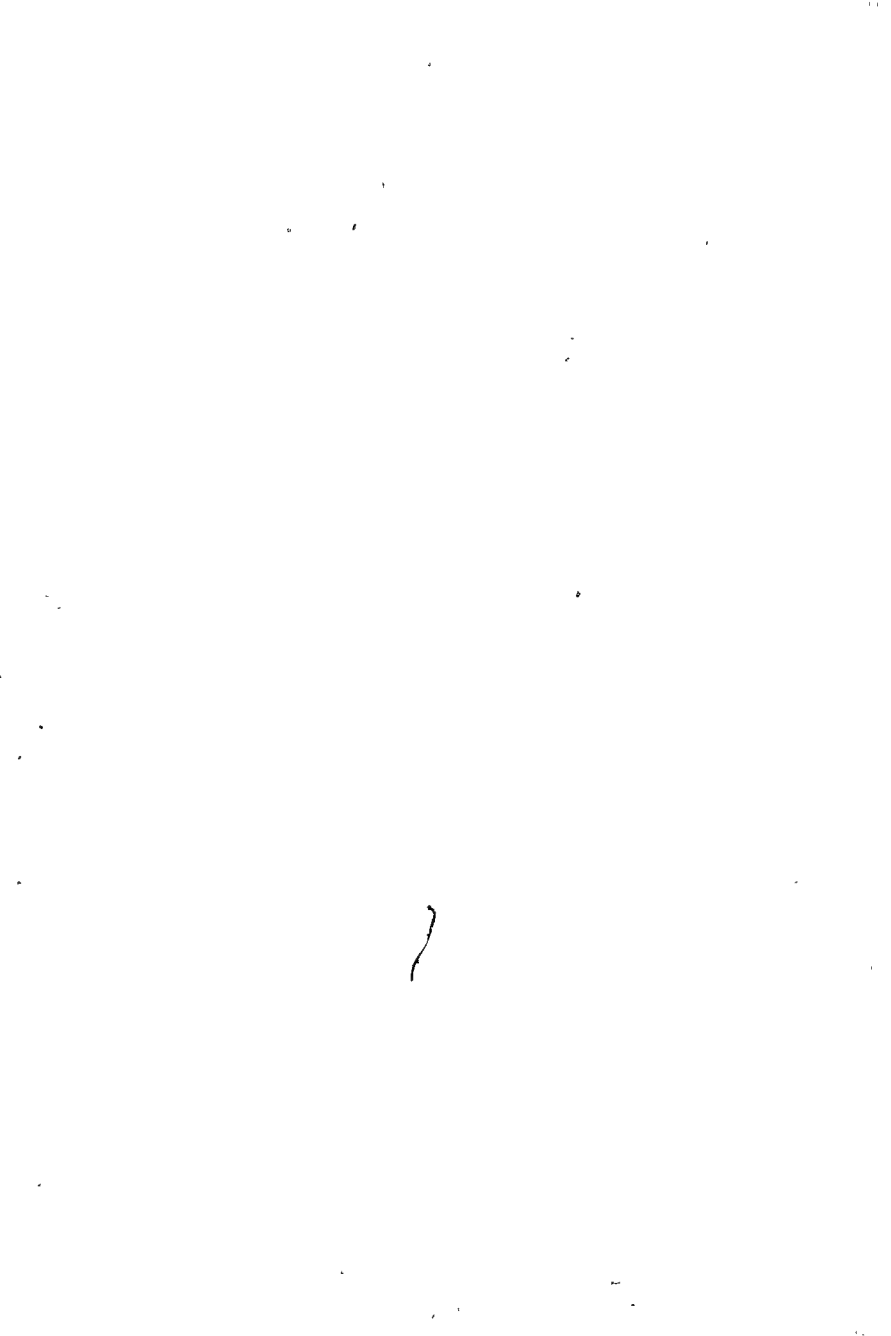
No word having come from headquarters that the Chief

had returned, Dalglish left Sergeant Brooks in charge, and proceeded to the Yard, to be there when Sir Basil Coyne returned. The only other discovery he had made of any importance was a bank pass book with the London City & Midlands Bank, showing that Anthony had made a deposit of £20,000, with withdrawals amounting approximately to £4,500. He had telephoned the bank, to learn that beyond such facts they knew absolutely nothing of their client.





THE SCORPION
CHAPTER III
THEORIES AND EXPERIMENT



CHAPTER III

THEORIES AND EXPERIMENT

HALF an hour later he was closeted with Sir Basil Coyne in his private office, and had related the circumstances of Tomkins's death.

"I don't remember a more peculiar case," Sir Basil said, puzzled. "Those scorpions have a big significance, undoubtedly. It looks more like the work of some secret society. We haven't any on record, have we, with a scorpion as an emblem?"

"None, sir," Dalgleish answered.

"Both burglary and murder were evidently contemplated," the Chief went on, "and that again looks more like an individual, unless he held something that was incriminating against such a society. You say you haven't gathered many details concerning Anthony?"

"Very few, sir. There was that account with the bank, but the bankers say they know nothing of him beyond that he is a customer. Tomkins couldn't tell us very much, except that he came to England from Vera Cruz four months ago. There were labels on some trunks to verify that. Of course, Tomkins may not have told all he knew."

"He didn't come to England with Anthony?"

"No, sir. He was engaged by Anthony since his arrival."

"There was no correspondence that might indicate relatives or friends?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Strange," the Chief reflected. "What about Tomkins's correspondence?"

"Apparently he had none, either," Dalgleish told him. "Of course, anything may have happened to Anthony's, but Tomkins's room hadn't been disturbed at all. If Anthony had made a will, that was probably taken away too."

"Or may be in the hands of his lawyer. We'll have to discover who he is. Meanwhile, Tomkins is the bigger mystery. Go over the points for murder and suicide again, will you?"

"All the evidence we have got suggests murder," the inspector said stolidly. "Those bruises on his cheek, his cry for help, his attempt to say something again about the masked Chinaman. But, with nine men from Scotland Yard there, besides Brooks, the architect, and myself, the murderer couldn't possibly have escaped being found. When Brooks and I searched the apartment before, there was a remote chance that he might have dodged from one room to another. There are so many doors in the place."

"And suicide?" Sir Basil prompted.

"Practically no evidence at all. Dr. Gleason suggested that he might have been hypnotized the night before . . . that is, last night. He may have been made an accessory by compulsion, and in that case remembered more than he told me."

"How much did he tell you?"

"Almost nothing. He said he remembered a voice, and that the face painted on the mask was Chinese."

"You wouldn't suggest that he actually murdered Anthony?"

"Impossible!" Dalglish was emphatic. "Not of his own free will," he added. "He was not the type of man to phone Scotland Yard, and then stay to brazen it out."

"Then hardly the man to pick up a poisonous scorpion and apply it to his own throat," Sir Basil observed.

"Unless, as I say, sir, he remembered more than he told me," Dalglish replied, "and was more afraid of disclosure than he was of the scorpion. When he said he started remembering, he was with me in Anthony's bedroom. If he wasn't an accessory, his memory would most likely suggest possible harm to himself. Yet he left the security of being with me to go for a drink; and he didn't come back. Therefore, he wasn't afraid that someone was going to harm him. That seems to indicate, sir, that he stayed there contemplating suicide with the scorpion rather than face further questioning."

"What did he say about the masked Chinaman?"

"The masked Chinaman is" Then he died. Knowing that he was dying, he may have tried to tell me what he was afraid to tell me while he was alive."

"Nice reasoning, Dalglish," Sir Basil said drily, "but it doesn't exactly condone you for letting him out of your sight."

The Inspector had been expecting some such censure, but he was ready to defend himself.

"I knew he couldn't get out of the suite," he said. "I

admit that it was an error of judgment. The fact that he had phoned here and waited, too, eliminated any question of attempt to escape, beside the fact that the windows were too high to jump from. He knew that I was not holding him under suspicion. His finger markings in no way correspond with the impressions on the knob of the safe."

"Such mistakes are sometimes costly. Murder or suicide, you see the critical position it places Scotland Yard in, I hope," Sir Basil said, not too pleasantly. He went on immediately, however, in a more encouraging manner: "There's one feature that just occurs to me. It fits in with the idea of suicide. Suppose, for a minute, that the murderer of Richard Anthony wished to dispose of the servant also. Is it conceivable that he would risk his neck by waiting until you were all there for the sake of being spectacular?"

"It isn't conceivable, sir," Inspector Dalgleish breathed with relief. The Chief's remarks had been too condemning for comfort.

Before Sir Basil replied there was a knock at the door. Dr. Gleason entered, dragging with him a mongrel dog.

"I took the liberty of bringing this animal in here, sir, so that you could witness an experiment," he said "It has remained unclaimed for a week in the stray dog pound, and was for the lethal chamber today. If the experiment is a success, it will be almost as merciful as the other. Has Inspector Dalgleish mentioned my opinion that it was not the scorpion venom that killed Anthony and Tomkins, sir?"

"Then what was it?" the Chief asked quickly.

"We noticed evidences of other poison on Tomkins,"

Dr. Gleason explained. "There are similar evidences in the case of Anthony, breaking down my first opinion of syncope through fright, accelerated by the injection of the scorpion. I haven't isolated the poison yet, and may have to solicit the advice of Sir Victor Norton; but if what I think is correct, we shall see a very speedy result. The element I refer to must have been smeared on the scorpion's claws. Hold this dog, Inspector, will you please?"

He took the dead scorpion from the box in which he had carried it. While Dalgleish held the dog, he gave its sensitive nose a quick scratch with the claw. The result was instantaneous . . . electrifying! The wretched animal emitted one howl, and made one frantic effort for freedom. In less than a minute it was stretched dead on the carpet!

"That's terrible!" Sir Basil Coyne exclaimed, aghast. He asked Dr. Gleason: "Would the effect be as quick on a human being?"

"Probably quicker, if applied to the throat instead of nose."

"How long was it between the time Tomkins cried out, and when he died?" the Chief turned to Dalgleish.

"It couldn't have been more than half a minute," Dalgleish answered.

Sir Basil Coyne looked again at the architect's blue prints, which Dalgleish had brought with him, and which were spread out on his desk.

"Where were you when he cried out, Dalgleish?" he asked.

The Inspector pointed. "Here, sir," he said. "In the bathroom."

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"And Brooks?"

"He was at the fire escape. He said he had taken a look outside beneath the back windows for ladder heel prints, and had just got back to the door."

"And you both ran to the kitchen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then it was impossible for a murderer to escape!" Sir Basil said emphatically, thumping his fist on the desk.

"Those bruises on Tomkins's cheek must have been made before, then," Dalglish hazarded. "I didn't observe them, but I didn't examine him closely."

"What is your opinion about them, Dr. Gleason?"

"They might not show through his natural complexion, but become pronounced through the pallor of death," Dr. Gleason answered. "It may have been necessary to stifle his cries before he was completely under hypnotic control," he added.

"You really think he was hypnotized?"

"If we admit that, and that he was used as an accessory, it eliminates much of the mystery of his death . . . and his returning memory," Dr. Gleason said.

"How, exactly?" the Chief asked.

"Under natural revulsion against assisting in committing a murder, the memory of what had occurred might straggle back. What is technically known as post-hypnotic suggestion might account for the other."

"Then it was virtually murder?"

"It would be difficult to prove it as such."

"We'll postpone a complete inquest until tomorrow morning. If you like, I'll ask Sir Victor Norton to attend," Sir

Basil decided. "In the meantime, until something else transpires at the inquest or later, Scotland Yard will adhere to the opinion that Tomkins committed suicide. Inspector," he turned to Dalglish, "it's up to you to find the murderer of Anthony. I leave it entirely in your hands, but let me know from time to time if you make any progress. You see what you're up against, so for heaven's sake be careful!"





THE SCORPION
CHAPTER IV
EXECUTOR AND HEIRS



CHAPTER IV

EXECUTOR AND HEIRS

INSPECTOR Dalglish had not been long back at the Burlington Apartments when a constable entered with a card. It bore the name of William Forbes, of the firm of Forbes, Royston and Dulcie, Barristers and Attorneys. Dalglish hastened to the door to admit him.

"I telephoned Scotland Yard, and was informed that Inspector Dalglish was here in charge," Forbes explained his presence.

"I am Inspector Dalglish," the inspector said.

"As you have seen by my card, my name is Forbes," the attorney replied. "I am . . . or was . . . Mr. Anthony's lawyer."

"Come right in, Mr. Forbes!" Dalglish dropped his official curtness to welcome him. "I have been hoping someone would turn up who might help to solve some of this mystery."

"This atrocious crime was totally unexpected by me, Inspector, I assure you," Forbes protested.

"I inferred nothing to the contrary, Mr. Forbes," Dalglish was abrupt again. "I conclude, however, that you were in Mr. Anthony's confidence."

"To a certain extent, yes. I have been his legal adviser since he came to England four months ago. But all his communications with me have been strictly confined to legal business."

"You have written him letters?"

"No. The communications to which I refer have all been verbal, either in person or on the telephone."

"That settles one point so far as you are concerned," Dalgleish said. "There was nothing to connect you or anyone else with the handling of the estate. Indeed, there are no personal letters at all."

"I am not surprised at that," the lawyer replied. "He was not engaged in business of any description, and, as far as I know, he hadn't a relative in the world."

"He had friends, naturally?"

"The only ones I know reside also in London."

"Enemies?"

"He never mentioned any. I must say, however, that he was very reticent about matters which did not concern my legal capacity."

"You wouldn't say he was peculiar?"

"Why do you ask such a question, Inspector?"

"He had certain strange ideas which have come to light, Mr. Forbes," Dalgleish answered. "For example, there was his remarkable objection to having women sleep in the apartment."

"That was peculiar, I admit," Forbes said. "As a matter of fact, I didn't know it before."

"You wouldn't suggest he was peculiar enough to scatter

his own things around, and then get back into bed and commit suicide?"

"Why, certainly not. In all his dealings with me he was perfectly rational. I don't for one moment believe he was the type of man to take his own life."

"Then he allowed himself to be murdered without so much as disturbing the bedclothes," Dalgleish said.

"But that is extraordinary!" the lawyer was amazed.

"And it isn't the only extraordinary feature about this case," the Inspector replied grimly. "Picture this litter as we walked into it this morning!" And he stepped aside so that Forbes could see into the library and bedroom.

"My goodness!" Forbes exclaimed. "It looks as if burglary was the motive. Richard Anthony would never scatter his effects around like that. He was too methodical."

"We have yet to ascertain what was the motive," Dalgleish returned. "This looks more like a deliberate search than a simple burglary. We have not yet discovered if anything is missing."

"Tomkins would surely know . . . to a certain extent."

"Tomkins committed suicide!"

"But . . ." the lawyer's amazement was increasing, "the papers said that Tomkins phoned Scotland Yard, or notified the police, or something like that!"

"He did. It was afterwards he killed himself . . . after we were here."

"You don't think . . . he killed Mr. Anthony?"

"No; he didn't. Or, if he did, he didn't open the safe. The finger-prints of the burglar are too legible for any such mistake to arise."

"Is that your reason for thinking Mr. Anthony might have opened it himself?" the lawyer asked.

"He didn't open it. The finger-prints are extremely broad, while Anthony's fingers were tapering."

"I can't understand what you say about his position in bed," Forbes puzzled. "The papers described his death as 'horrible!'"

"It was." I'd hate to have it applied to me."

"May I ask you to tell me what it was?"

"You may, and I'll tell you, because if I can I want to stir your memory with regard to any chance word Anthony may have dropped, which might help us in finding a clue. He died clutching a scorpion at his throat."

"A . . . scorpion!" Forbes stammered.

"Yes. And the reason I suggested possible suicide to you was that Tomkins committed suicide in the same way."

"You have reason to think there was some bond between them?"

"No," Dalgleish said. "But I was wondering."

"There couldn't have been," Forbes replied. "Tomkins has been in his service only four months."

"That, of course, is as far as you know," the Inspector returned. "There is also the possibility that they had some previous connection. Tomkins may have got himself engaged to this position for the purpose of fulfilling, shall we say, some form of revenge. Or again, he may have been introduced to the position by a third person with the same object in view."

"Which seems the more likely of two unbelievable situations," Forbes hazarded.

"Not so unbelievable at that," Dalglish replied. "Tomkins apparently knew the person at the back of it all. He was about to tell me when he died."

"One would hardly credit the extraordinary features of the case," the lawyer's amazement was increasing rapidly.

"When we arrive at something tangible they will doubtless be more extraordinary still, Mr. Forbes. According to Tomkins, whose is the only version we have, the murderer wore a Chinese mask. Now, I would ask you, did Richard Anthony have any connections with China at any time?"

"He never mentioned it in my hearing," Forbes answered. "I know very little of his movements before he came to England, except that he *was* interested in a silver mine in Mexico. The friends I mentioned could tell you more about that than I can."

"I was intending to get round to them in a minute," the inspector said. "First there is another matter. You have a copy of the will, haven't you?"

"I have the original," the lawyer answered. "The only copy is one filed at Somerset House. In your official capacity I know you can gain access to that at any time, so if it will save you any trouble, I'll answer any questions concerning it that you like to ask. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you at once that the only persons mentioned in the will are the three friends I spoke about just now."

"Oh!"

"Yes. The whole of my client's estate, after the succession duties have been liquidated, is divided equally among these three men."

"They are resident in London, you say?"

"Yes. All four left Vera Cruz together."

"Do they by any chance know the extent to which they will benefit by his death?"

"They do. But, as all four are equally wealthy, they should at once be eliminated from suspicion."

The inspector was becoming interested . . his questions more pointed.

"In the effects we found here," he said, "there was a bank pass book showing a balance of around fifteen thousand pounds or more. Were all of Richard Anthony's assets represented by that amount of cash?"

"Indeed no. The estate is valued more closely in the neighbourhood of half a million," the lawyer told him without hesitation. "The balance, in bonds and stock, is in the safety vault in our own offices. You can see by that . . the vast amount of his fortune, I mean . . and theirs being equally vast . . ."

"They are aware that the greater part of his money is in your hands?" Dalgleish interrupted his floundering to question sharply.

"Undoubtedly. They are all my clients. I hold most of their securities as well."

"You don't know of anything Richard Anthony may have possessed which would be of extreme value to someone else . . something which might even prompt to murder?"

"Absolutely nothing that I am aware of."

"There is something more intimate in this than murder with simple burglary as a motive," the inspector continued. "Your ordinary murderer does not go around wearing a Chinese mask, and carrying poisonous scorpions. And this

search has been thorough, systematic . . all suggestive that the perpetrator of the crime was intimate with Richard Anthony's private affairs."

"But . . my dear sir!" Forbes expostulated.

"I am not accusing anybody," Dalglish said abruptly. "All I am suggesting is that his heirs may be able to throw some light on the subject."

"I hope they can, too," Forbes said fervently. "When you see them you will understand the impossibility of connecting any of them with such an atrocious crime. If you like I will give you their names and addresses now."

"Please do," the inspector replied. He wrote them down as Forbes enumerated them.

Charles Brimmer, 84 Maple Road, Hammersmith.

Samuel Norton, 4 Lorraine Apartments, Ealing Broadway.

Clifford Beauchamp, 25 Crescent Mansions, Brondesbury.

"It's strange, don't you think, Mr. Forbes," he remarked as he was finishing, "that not one of them has been around to make enquiries? They must have read the morning papers, unless they keep very late hours."

"Unless they are out of town," Forbes replied. "You can easily ascertain that if you ring Hammersmith 247, say."

"Mr. Brimmer's number?"

"Yes. If he is away, there is sure to be someone about the place to tell you where he is."

"Unlike Mr. Anthony, then, he maintains a staff of servants?"

"Oh, yes. He is married. The other gentlemen are still bachelors."

Mr. Brimmer was brought to the phone when Dalgleish rang the number.

"Inspector Dalgleish of Scotland Yard speaking, Mr. Brimmer," Dalgleish said. "Mr. Forbes, your attorney, has informed me that you are a personal friend of Mr. Richard Anthony's. You saw the account of his death in the morning newspapers?"

"Yes, yes," Brimmer answered, in very evident agitation. "Murdered, the papers say."

"They do," Dalgleish was officially curt.

"You have some intelligence you can give us, Inspector?"

"Us?" Dalgleish repeated.

"I am speaking for Mr. Norton and Mr. Beauchamp as well as myself," Brimmer said hesitatingly.

"They are there with you, then?"

"No, but I am expecting them. I have been talking to both of them, and they are on their way here. We intended to come to Dick Anthony's to make enquiries together. Are you there now, Inspector?"

"Yes; but I'll save myself time, and you trouble, by coming along to you, too."

"There is nothing you can tell me now?"

"At present, Mr. Brimmer, I am looking for information myself, for I've been able to gain little enough here."

He hung up the receiver, and turned to Forbes.

"I look to you, Mr. Forbes," he said, "not to communicate with them before I have seen them."

"It is possible they will ring the office, now that they know I have spoken to you," Forbes objected.

"If you can delay your return half an hour, I shall be in Hammersmith," the inspector said.

Forbes agreed reluctantly, and suggested: "I came here with another purpose in mind, too, Inspector. Someone will have to take possession of Mr. Anthony's effects. My firm being the executor of the estate..."

"Scotland Yard will doubtless authorize you to administer it," Dalgleish replied impatiently. "But you cannot do so until we have finished our investigations."

Sounding the police syren attached to his car to command a right-of-way, the inspector reached Hammersmith without any unnecessary delay. At Brimmer's residence, he found that both Norton and Beauchamp had preceded him. Ushered into the room where they were, he found them very much perturbed, and eager to ask questions. He placed a curb on their impatience by stating bluntly: "Gentlemen, before I answer any questions, I want to learn something with regard to your relationship with Richard Anthony. You know, Mr. Forbes tells me, the extent to which you will benefit by his death. To save delay, will you please tell me what circumstances place you in such a position?"

They had, evidently, already had time to discuss such a possibility, for Brimmer answered without hesitation: "Certainly, Inspector. We understand that, offhand, our position is one likely to invite suspicion, so we will place all the information concerning ourselves unreservedly at your disposal, though I am afraid it may not help you much. Together, we were owners of a silver mine in Mexico of

considerable proportions. We retired, selling the whole thing, some six months ago."

"I should like to ask questions as they occur to me," Dalgleish observed, as he paused. "This is one. Did you meet in Mexico, or were you acquainted before that?"

"We have known each other for many years," Brimmer answered. "We have been associated in many enterprises, but always with the same partnership agreement . . . that of *ton-tine*, which means, of course, that any gains or benefits which might accrue to us belonged to all individually and severally, reverting to the survivor or survivors, except the portion which would naturally divert to the wives and families of any of us who might marry. The fact that I am the only one married has, I can assure you, in no way affected our mutual and amicable relationship."

"One would infer that from what you have previously said, Mr. Brimmer," the inspector remarked.

"For purposes of convenience," Brimmer continued, "we divided the proceeds from the mine before our return to England, which act made each one of us independently wealthy. We each had all that we wanted, and there was nothing to prevent us then from annulling our previous agreement, and each going his own separate way; but, as none of us had any remembered relatives, except those I had made by marriage, we decided to let it stand. Following that decision, we all of us made our wills at the same time. with the other three named in each as sole heirs . . . I leaving it to my friends to see that my wife and family were well cared for . . . and appointed Messrs. Forbes, Royston and Dulcie our executors, with Mr. Forbes as our personal

attorney. That, I think, is a comprehensive statement, given, as I said, absolutely without reserve, Inspector. Now may we, in return . . . ?”

“One moment, and I will reciprocate your confidence in full,” Dalglish said quickly. “But first tell me, please, if in your different enterprises, which, from the curios distributed throughout Mr. Anthony’s apartment, have taken you into different parts of the world, you can remember if you collectively, or Mr. Anthony personally, made any enemy or enemies who might have instigated Mr. Anthony’s death?”

His words had a remarkable effect upon them. Until then they had, with considerable success, managed to retain their composure, though they were evidently under such a strain as might be occasioned by their friend’s sudden death. Now, perspiring freely, they became suddenly as limp as rags.

“I told you there was only one person who could have done it!”

It was Beauchamp who spoke, addressing his two partners. If anything, though he spoke excitedly, he was less agitated than they.

“Ah!” Dalglish exclaimed. “Then there was such an enemy?”

“There was,” Norton faltered, “but . . . he couldn’t have found Dick Anthony after all this time!”

“A personal enemy of Mr. Anthony’s?”

“No; of all of us.”

“Kwong Heisu!” Brimmer’s voice trembled over the name.

Kwong Heisu! A Chinaman! Here at last was some-

thing tangible to work upon . . something to corroborate what Tomkins had said.

"Who is Kwong Heisu?" the inspector demanded.

"High Priest of the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions!" Beauchamp answered.

Buddha of the Scorpions! Enlightening facts were now crowding upon each other.

"And the cause of his enmity?" Dalglish thrust the question tersely.

"I'll tell you," Beauchamp said. He was still the only one with any semblance of composure. "We were in China, in the District of Shensi. It was there we started together. We had pooled our respective funds, and had started a tea plantation. Shensi is in Central China. Shortly afterwards came the Boxer Rising.

"The temple of Buddha of the Scorpions is in Shensi, a matter of a few miles from our plantation. Kwong Heisu was one of the chief instigators of the Boxers against the whites . . Christians. Under his leadership our plantation was destroyed, and our buildings burned. We were lucky to escape with our lives.

"In retaliation, we took advantage of his absence upon another errand of destruction, this time against a Roman Catholic Mission, and looted the temple under his charge of certain jewels. Following that, we got through to the coast, and boarded the first vessel leaving port. Its destination was Mozambique. We didn't care where it was going, so long as we got away from a country where fearful massacres were a daily occurrence."

"What makes you think Kwong Heisu connected you with the robbery?" Dalglish asked.

"At the port where we embarked we heard rumours that he was on our trail. He would trace us through Scott."

"Who is Scott?"

"There were originally five members in our partnership," Norton answered. "Scott died."

"How did he die?"

"Killed by scorpions."

"Where?" Dalglish urged impatiently.

"In the temple of Buddha. The jewels, we knew, were concealed in a small chamber in the base of the image of Buddha. We had heard of them, but thought it was a myth. There were myriads of them, guarding the jewels. Scott crawled in first. He cried to be dragged out again. There were dozens on him . . . on every part of him that was exposed. We pushed lighted sticks into the chamber, and . . ."

"To smoke out the scorpions?" Dalglish interrupted.

"Either that, or make them commit suicide. Scorpions always do that when confronted by fire. Their own poison is deadly against themselves. We thought Scott was dead when we left him; but he couldn't have been. That fiend, Kwong Heisu, must have tortured him to make him reveal our names."

"Or, thinking you had deserted him, he betrayed you," Dalglish said. He added, emphatically: "I am not sure that I wouldn't have done it myself."

"We were sure he was dead," Norton returned. "Those scorpions in Central China are very deadly."

Thinking of Dr. Gleason's experiment with the scorpion

that had killed Anthony, Dalglish wondered how much of cowardice there was in the assertion. However, he said: "Well, he may have found other means of ascertaining your identities . . . or Richard Anthony's at least. He doubtless knew whose plantation he had destroyed, and associated you together when he found Scott. Whichever way it is, Kwong Heisu . . . or someone else who knew of the scorpions murdered Richard Anthony. He died clutching a scorpion at his throat!"

"Good heavens! It must have been Kwong Heisu!" Beauchamp exclaimed.

"Or," the inspector was deliberate in his repetition, "as I remarked, someone else who knew of the scorpions."

"Why do you suggest that?" they asked him.

"Because," he said, again deliberately, "it is a long time since the Boxer Rising. If Kwong Heisu had set himself so urgently on your trail, I should imagine he would have found you before. Who else besides yourselves knew of the theft of the jewels?"

"No one. We have never told a soul. No one but Scott."

"You don't think Scott can have escaped?"

"Impossible!"

"Anyone could wear a Chinese mask, and impersonate Kwong Heisu," Dalglish went on.

"Did the murderer wear a mask . . . more like the hood of a Ku Klux Klansman, though made of silk . . . with a Chinese face painted on it?" Beauchamp asked, hesitatingly.

"Your description tallies with that of Tomkins," the inspector said.



"Then it must have been Kwong Heisul" Beauchamp asserted.

"To a Chinaman, such a purpose as his would appear a just act of vengeance," Dalgleish said quietly. But he changed his tone immediately, and rapped out the question: "Why should he conceal his identity from his intended victim?"

"Because he knew the mask would add to his chances of recognition," Beauchamp answered. "It is a symbol of his High Priesthood. He always wore it when officiating in the temple."

"But you have seen him without it?"

"Yes."

"You would recognize him on the street?"

"Easily. He has two scars on his face."

"How did he get them?"

"They were self-inflicted . . . a gash on each side across the cheekbone. Each High Priest of that temple in succession . . ."

"What connection would Tomkins have with him?" Dalgleish asked abruptly.

"Tomkins? Why, nothing."

"Then why did he commit suicide?"

"Tomkins . . . committed . . . suicide?" Norton faltered.

"You are sure he wasn't murdered, too?" Beauchamp asked quickly.

"He committed suicide while we were there," the inspector said. He continued deliberately: "I will give you my impression of why he did that, gentlemen. As you say, he could have no possible connection with your Kwong

Heisu, but he *knew* the person who killed his master, and was afraid he would be forced to reveal him!"

His three auditors gazed at each other in incredulous amazement . . doubtfully . . for a moment suspiciously. It was Beauchamp again who broke the awful silence. He said: "Inspector, Dick Anthony was more than a one-time partner to us. He was a valued friend. I can quite see your point of view . . that, from the nature of our mutual agreement, we standing to benefit from his death . . ."

"I believe to the extent of a third of half a million," Dalgleish suggested.

"This is all nonsense!" Brimmer broke in, agitatedly. "You are wasting time, Inspector, suspecting us while our own lives are not worth a moment's purchase."

"Unless you can help me trace the murderer of Richard Anthony," Dalgleish said.

"We have already told you all we know about Kwong Heisu, and his motive for murdering Dick Anthony," Brimmer replied doggedly.

"And I repeat, gentlemen, that thirty years have elapsed since the Boxer Rising."

"He would know that we are English, and might have been waiting until we settled here," Beauchamp suggested.

"God! Once I can get out of it, England will never see me again!" Norton stammered.

"Unfortunately, flight is temporarily impossible," the inspector said. "I must warn you against attempting to leave London."

"Then you persist in holding us under suspicion?" Beauchamp demanded.

"I am holding you as material witnesses," Dalglish replied. "I regret the necessity, but trust you can see that it is unavoidable. Further, I want one of you to accompany me to the Burlington Apartments now. With Tomkins dead, there is no one but yourselves likely to be in a position to know if anything of material value besides money has been stolen. If any one of you is more familiar with Mr. Anthony's effects than the other two, I should like him to come with me. I don't want to encroach upon the time of you all."

He had reasons for stressing the point that only one of them would be required. With three of them moving around in the suite, it would be difficult to keep them all under his own personal supervision, and prevent discussion between them at the scene of the crime. As he spoke, he had been watching them closely, and had read in the glances they exchanged that they were endeavouring to transmit thoughts among themselves that were not intended for his comprehension. However, he rose and said: "I realize, gentlemen, that it may require a little discussion to decide who shall come, and I won't inconvenience you with my presence. But time is pressing, and I can allow you no more than ten minutes. I will wait in my car outside, and take one of you to the Burlington Arcade. His own car may follow to bring him back."

"Would you mind, Inspector," Brimmer's voice was quavering, "taking a look round the house, to see if there are any weak spots through which an intruder might come? My wife and daughter are fortunately in Brighton for the week."

"I'll do that," Dalglish replied. "By the way," he added, pausing at the door of the room, "there is one question I almost forgot to ask. In China, did you ever hear, gentlemen, that your High Priest was accredited with hypnotic powers?"

"Hell, yes!" Beauchamp exploded. "That doesn't half describe the power attributed to him. His followers believe that he has the 'life and death' influence."

"Which might mean?" the inspector queried, with more apparent interest.

"A man on whom he put his curse would sicken and die," Norton explained, before Beauchamp could answer.

Dalglish smiled incredulously. "That sounds rather too far-fetched," he said. "Had he possessed any such power, he might have saved himself a lot of bother, and . . . none of you would be here."

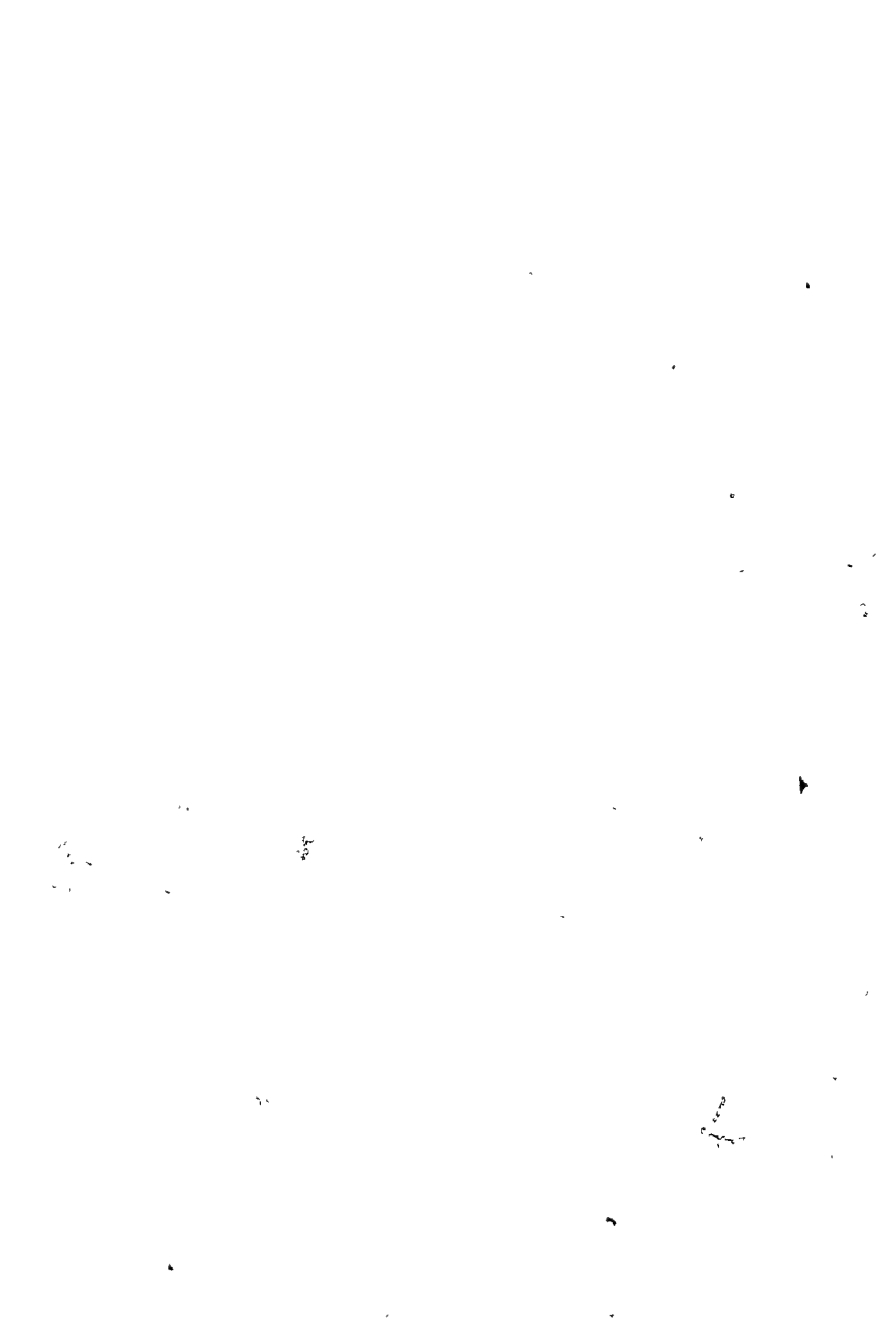
"It applied only to his own Buddhist followers," Beauchamp said.

"Which explains why he didn't employ it with Tomkins," Dalglish rejoined. "That is . . . not entirely."

"Why . . . what do you mean?" Brimmer gasped.

"Tomkins professed at first that he was hypnotized," the inspector said slowly. "There are evidences that he committed suicide under the same influence . . . hypnotic suggestion. He killed himself with a second scorpion. In that respect his death was identical with Richard Anthony's!"

THE SCORPION
CHAPTER V
THE 'LIGHT OF BUDDHA'



CHAPTER V

THE 'LIGHT OF BUDDHA'

THERE was an atmosphere of relief when the door closed behind Inspector Dalgleish. On top of the strain of Richard Anthony's death, the inspector's manner had created a tension that was stifling. Ordinarily an aggressive type of inquisitor, he was one of those who would welcome the introduction of third degree tactics into Scotland Yard. The three men had found his bullying attitude extremely trying; they were not to know that that attitude was just now aggravated by the fact that he himself had been severely raked over the coals by the Head of Scotland Yard, for his apparent negligence in the case of Tomkins's suicide.

The only logical conclusion they could draw from his remarks and questions was that they themselves were under suspicion. They were unaware that his manner was intended primarily to force a break, he watching covertly for a slip which might reveal a motive for the crime more immediate than the theft of the jewels thirty years before. The ten minutes for discussion he had granted them came, therefore, as an unexpected respite. It seemed for a moment that his suspicions had been allayed. Again they were unaware of his purpose. While adhering to his original resolve to pre-

vent discussion at the scene of the crime, he wanted to encourage such discussion here, the result being carried in one head, by one person whom he could watch with greater facility than he could three.

Though they had not hoped for such an opportunity, it was something they had badly wanted. From the suddenness of the crime, they had already drawn their conclusions. It was Kwong Heisu who had tracked them at last. The details of the murder . . . and suicide . . . as described by Inspector Dalglish, were additional proof that it could be none other than he. It was impossible that they had been mistaken in thinking Scott dead when they left him, therefore the suggestion that he still lived, and, assuming the rôle of the masked Chinaman, had tracked them for purposes of revenge, was too improbable for consideration. Even if he had lived, recovering from the poison of the scorpions, he would already be in the fanatical Buddhist's hands, with no possible chance of escape.

It was the hand of Kwong Heisu that had struck; there was not a vestige of doubt in their minds. And they knew the purpose of his coming.

Prior to the arrival of Inspector Dalglish, they had had time to resolve one thing, and that was to disclose nothing concerning the most valuable of the jewels they had taken from the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions, a ruby-hued diamond known as the 'Light of Buddha'. That stone they had kept after disposing of all the rest, first for the reason that they had found no market where they could obtain anything approaching an adequate valuation, and later for sentimental reasons which developed.

The 'Light of Buddha' had presented a problem when they dissolved partnership. The problem was which one of them should hold the stone. They had decided it by drawing lots, the diamond falling into Anthony's keeping. But the understanding was that he was to put it somewhere in safe depository, leaving a code message for the others in his safe, so that, if anything happened to him, the others would know where to find it. Therefore, apart from the instructions of the inspector from Scotland Yard, it was incumbent upon one of them to take the opportunity to visit Anthony's suite, and endeavour to find the expected code message. Sooner or later they had expected to be invited there officially, which explains why none of them had gone before, creating a possible misunderstanding in the inspector's mind. To have gone uninvited, to request permission to search among the papers in Anthony's safe, would have been to invite suspicion that there was something they were trying to conceal.

Inspector Dalgleish had mentioned nothing of such a code message. There was a chance that it had escaped his observation. Kwong Heisu would hardly connect it with the missing jewel, especially as he had no conceivable reason for knowing that Richard Anthony had been delegated its custodian.

'Unless Tomkins knew . . . and told him!' It was Norton who expressed the thought.

"Dick wouldn't dream of taking a servant into his confidence like that," Beauchamp replied.

"Then why did Tomkins kill himself?" Norton demanded.

"There is a bigger mystery in his death than that med-

dlesome inspector from Scotland Yard realizes," Beauchamp grumbled. "He wasn't an accomplice. That's unbelievable. The inspector says he recognized the murderer. Well, he could not have told more about him than we could. It is certain he wouldn't have killed himself to shield Kwong Heisu. Question is, did he kill himself? And Kwong Heisu wouldn't kill him to shield himself . . . unless he expected to do so before intelligence got to the police. The scorpion was enough evidence to us, as he intended it should be, of the murderer's identity."

"That talk of his being hypnotized! Do you think it possible Kwong Heisu made him murder Dick?" Norton asked.

"As I remember him, Kwong Heisu would take too great a pleasure in doing it himself," Brimmer interposed.

"We're wasting time discussing it," Beauchamp said impatiently. "Who is going with the inspector?"

The other two looked at each other without answering. Neither of them was anxious to visit the scene of the crime.

"All right, I'll go," Beauchamp declared rather scornfully.

"Do you think you should tell the inspector about the diamond?" Norton queried. He had the least stamina of the three.

"Certainly not," Beauchamp was abrupt. "He is more than suspicious of us now; you can imagine what he would think if he knew about that, after the knowledge being withheld so long. That diamond's incentive enough for anyone to commit murder."

"I was thinking that if Kwong Heisu is caught, he will be sure to mention it," Norton added.

"Kwong Heisu is an Oriental, and won't allow himself to be taken alive," Beauchamp was certain. "If anything happened . . . if Dick hadn't done what was agreed between us, and Kwong Heisu has got it . . . I would follow him to China and get it back again. But he hasn't got it; and I'm going to get the message that will tell us where it is. You'll wait for me here, won't you?"

The others acquiescing, he donned his hat and coat and left the house. His own chauffeur approached him. He instructed him to drive to the Burlington Arcade and await him there. Then he joined Inspector Dalglish, who had finished his inspection of the house and was waiting in his car.

In Anthony's apartment all was the same as Dalglish had left it. Beauchamp was surprised at the number of plain-clothes men he saw immediately he entered, but made no comment. "Go right ahead, Mr. Beauchamp," the inspector said. "And remember, even the slightest detail may be of importance."

Beauchamp made a pretence of checking over the various articles lying about, but the inspector, watching him covertly, observed that when he came to the litter in and around the safe his search, at first systematic and thorough, became gradually more flurried and impatient. He could find no trace of the code message he sought.

Soon after their arrival, Dalglish had taken advantage of Beauchamp's preoccupation to despatch Sergeant Brooks to Scotland Yard with a hurried message. The detective

had returned before the search was finally relinquished, and Beauchamp turned to Dalgleish, his face ashen though he was composing himself with a great effort, and remarked that he could find nothing missing with which he was acquainted.

As his car left the Arcade, it was followed by another in which were two plain-clothes men. Others had already gone to Hammersmith, with instructions to cover each of the partners when they separated.

Alone in his car, Beauchamp hardly knew what to think. The absence of the code message could indicate but one of two things; either that Kwong Heisu had realized the importance of something not immediately comprehensible, or that he had already discovered the diamond in the safe. Much as he coveted the 'Light of Buddha', he began to regret, now that he was face to face with the opportunity, his hasty boast that he would follow the Chinaman to retrieve it. To gain possession of it would not be so easy the second time, and the space of time he had spent in one of Kwong Heisu's houses of vengeance had done much to cool his ardour.

To his surprise, he returned to Hammersmith to find Brimmer and Norton even more perturbed than when he had left them. Before he could question them, or explain his own failure, Brimmer silently handed him a scrap of paper. His startled gaze, as he scanned it, saw nothing but a jumble of letters and figures. As realization of what it was dawned on him, he gasped: "Dick's message! How in Hades . . . ?"

He didn't finish. Brimmer had handed him an envelope

which was addressed to himself. "This came by mail shortly after you went," he said.

"Then it means . . . ?" Beauchamp stammered.

"Kwong Heisu not only knows that this refers to the diamond, but also knows my address as well," Brimmer answered. "This message is authentic," he continued, "for we have checked it with the key."

"What does it say?"

"Seek the Light of Buddha at 347 Chancery Lane, safety deposit box 207, Combination BHN4315'."

"We have telephoned the Safety Vault people, and have ascertained that Dick has a safety deposit box there, but that it can be opened only by a person with authority after probate has been granted his will," Norton added.

"Then Kwong Heisu hasn't got the diamond!" Beauchamp regained his composure sufficiently to rejoice.

"He can't get it, and that is why he has sent the code message to me," Brimmer was not so cheerful. "He evidently intends me to get it, and be the next recipient of his attentions."

"Hell!" Beauchamp ejaculated.

"It certainly is hell, if you can understand how I feel about it," Brimmer retorted. "It's just a cold-blooded warning."

"More likely to one of us than to you, Charlie," Beauchamp said. "Kwong Heisu knows you wouldn't keep the diamond if you got it. He may want to put Sam and myself off our guard."

"I hadn't thought of it that way," Brimmer replied, with evident relief.

"Neither had I," Norton said, less satisfied.

"Whether he finds it or not doesn't improve our position much," Brimmer added. "He didn't find it in the Burlington Arcade, but he still murdered Dick."

"Charlie and I have been talking this over since the mail came," Norton continued to Beauchamp. "It's quite clear to us that Scotland Yard, in the person of that meddlesome inspector, is trying more to substantiate its suspicions of us than to find Kwong Heisu. Since Dick's murder was discovered, what has Dalglish done? Instead of getting busy in Limehouse, or any other locality where Chinamen may hang out in London, he has spent his whole time either in the Burlington Apartments or here with us, and finishes with threatening to arrest us if we attempt to leave the city. He doesn't appear to realize that we are in danger at all. What I'm getting at is this, Cliff. We have not only got to look after our own protection, but we have got to have someone who will devote his whole time to searching for Kwong Heisu, and prevent him from doing mischief upon our own persons."

"I fully agree with that," Beauchamp said.

"We naturally expected you would, and so . . ."

"You have already taken some step?"

"Yes. We telephoned Forbes, and asked him to recommend some firm of private detectives. He has recommended a Mr. Spink, of the firm of Spink and Conway. We got in touch with Spink immediately, and are expecting him to arrive any minute."

"There is another point we discussed," Brimmer said. "Kwong Heisu will know by this time that Scotland Yard

is investigating the murder. He probably knows that Inspector Dalgleish is on the job. Therefore, an unknown outsider will have a better chance of picking up a contact with him. Also, we need him to keep some sort of a watch on this address in Chancery Lane. Kwong Heisu must have discovered in some way that Dick's code message referred to the diamond, or he wouldn't have sent it to me. With his infernal occultism, he may have decoded the message somehow. Perhaps Dick had been careless, and let Tomkins get an idea of the secret. If Kwong Heisu knows that, he will undoubtedly try to get the diamond from there."

"That means, of course, that Spink will have to be taken into our confidence about the diamond," Beauchamp suggested. "Do you think that's wise?"

"We can afford to pay him well enough to keep his tongue quiet," Brimmer returned.

A newsboy was shouting along the street: "More about the Anthony murder! Suicide of millionaire's servant! Speshul early eedition, paiper!"

Brimmer rang for his servant, and said: "Get me a paper!"

The man came back with it, and all three scanned it eagerly. The paragraph concerning the case contained very little additional information, beyond the statement of Tomkins's suicide. There were no particulars. Scotland Yard had not yet revealed them. But the paragraph ended thus:

"Scotland Yard has not yet issued a complete statement, but is known to be on the track of the criminal or criminals!"

"Criminals!" Beauchamp exclaimed disgustedly. "That means us, of course!"

The library door was again opened by the servant.

"Mr. Spink!" he announced, ushering that gentleman in.

THE SCORPION

CHAPTER VI

SPINK ACCEPTS THE COMMISSION



CHAPTER VI

SPINK ACCEPTS THE COMMISSION

IN some respects, with their first glance at Spink, the three partners were inclined to be disappointed. After their discomfiting interview with Inspector Dalglish, they were tacitly hoping for someone of entirely different character . . . the type of fiction detective whom no one would recognize as such, the sort of individual who might pass for a ledger clerk or small-town tradesman, his alert, ferret eyes camouflaged by fictitious lenses . . . the antithesis of the dynamic energy he might assume at a moment's notice. Instead of this, the stalwart bearing, the firmly-measured tread with which he entered the room, proclaimed rather an association with the Guards or the Metropolitan Police Force. Indeed, clothed in the regulation uniform, he would have made a typical, stolid Metropolitan policeman, whose main activity was holding out a broad hand to push back a too-obtrusive motor-bus, or otherwise compel traffic regularity. In one respect, however, he might readily be expected to meet their requirements. Norton had outlined their need of protection, and an appraising glance at his wonderful physique assured them that he was well equipped to fulfil that purpose adequately. As a matter of fact, they soon

began to regard him in other ways with increasing admiration.

He accepted the cigar Brimmer proffered him, also an invitation to be seated.

"Mr. Forbes recommended you to us, Mr. Spink," Brimmer observed. "He is our attorney. We understand you have been employed several times by clients of his."

"In quite a variety of cases, yes," Spink replied.

"We also understand . . . successfully," Brimmer went on.

"Our clients have always expressed their satisfaction. In our line of business, it is, of course, impossible to supply individual references."

"Mr. Forbes's word was sufficient," Brimmer hastened to assure him. "As I told you over the telephone, Mr. Spink, if you decide to act for us, you must be prepared to take a considerable amount of risk."

"Risk is incidental to the profession of a private detective," Spink said quietly. "When it comes to that, I am prepared to take care of myself. When not otherwise occupied, I play half-back for the Finsbury Park football team, to keep myself fit; I have some reputation as a boxer, and took a voluntary course in jiu-jitsu while with the Metropolitan Police."

"Ah! Then you have been in the force?" Beauchamp remarked quickly. "You are not connected with the police now, are you?"

"No," Spink answered. "My partner, Mr. Conway, and I both served two years in the Metropolitan Police. When we resigned we were offered positions on the staff of

Scotland Yard, but we had already decided to embark upon an independent career. We have never regretted it."

"You may regret it still less if you can accomplish what we want done," Brimmer went on. "We are prepared to pay you £10,000, together with any incidental expenses. There is one condition, however, to which you must agree. To assist you, there are certain facts we may place in your hands, about which Scotland Yard must be kept in ignorance."

"Facts which pertain only to our clients we keep in strict confidence," Spink replied. "We may have to enlighten the agents we employ with regard to such facts, but we guarantee their secrecy. But we must of necessity guarantee that secrecy with certain restrictions, gentlemen. If it is an investigation in which Scotland Yard also is interested, no money you could offer would purchase our perjury, or our agents', on the witness stand. Apart from that, we have no objection at all to getting advantage over the Scotland Yard officials. Naturally, in a criminal investigation we are finally compelled to turn to Scotland Yard before an arrest can be made, but it is only as a last resource. We work independently as far as we can. From what you say, gentlemen, I conclude that it is a matter which will come before Scotland Yard sooner or later."

"It concerns the murder of Richard Anthony. He was a great friend of ours," Brimmer told him. "But," he added, "there is no reason why you should go to Scotland Yard and say that you are working for us."

"It is equally impossible for me, or any other private detective, to work for you without Scotland Yard's know-



ledge," Spink replied. "It is apparently already known to the officials that you are friends of the late Mr Anthony's."

"How do you know that?" Beauchamp asked sharply.

"I didn't of course know why they were there, but I saw several plain-clothes men I know loitering within an approachable distance of this house," Spink answered. "They will have seen me come in."

"Damn!" Beauchamp exploded. "That fool Dalglish . . . !"

"Inspector Dalglish would naturally be working on the case," Spink went on. "The Burlington Arcade comes inside his zone. But, tell me, why is he watching you?"

Beauchamp answered wrathfully: "Because, instead of affording us the protection to which we are justly entitled, he prefers to suspect us of complicity in the crime."

"I am doubtful about that," Spink said thoughtfully. "If he suspected you, he wouldn't tell you so. The first intimation you would have would be seeing a warrant for your arrest. He is more probably holding you because he figures you are material witnesses."

"That seems to be an everyday expression around here," Beauchamp retorted. "He used it himself, but he didn't deceive us. If we were considered witnesses only, what does this paper mean about Scotland Yard being on the trail of the criminals . . . not *the criminal*?"

"If there is more than one person suspected . . ." Spink began, but Beauchamp interrupted him: "There is only one person that could be suspected, and Inspector Dalglish could have named him had he wanted to. We told him!"

"Then you knew?" There was more than incredulity in

the detective's voice. It seemed quite easy to conjecture what had been in Inspector Dalglish's mind. If they had made a statement like that, it was no wonder that he was holding them as indispensable witnesses.

"We knew nothing of the circumstances before Inspector Dalglish came here," Brimmer was saying. "But those circumstances . . . the murder of Dick Anthony, and the method of it . . . the supposed suicide of his valet Tomkins, right under your precious inspector's nose . . . all pointed conclusively enough for us to the person we named to him."

"And that person?" Spink asked. Before they could answer, he added quickly: "Pardon me, gentlemen, I shouldn't have asked that. I forgot for the moment that I had not expressed my willingness to take the case. I will signify that willingness now, and leave you to tell me all you wish."

At the request of the other two, Brimmer acted as spokesman, and told him in much the same language as that in which they had related the same story to Inspector Dalglish. When Brimmer spoke of their joint heirship in Richard Anthony's estate, Spink thought again that he could see the inspector's point of view. As Brimmer paused he queried: "Was it from you that Inspector Dalglish first learned of your interest in your friend's estate, gentlemen?"

"We told him exactly as we have told you," Beauchamp answered. "As a matter of fact, however, we think he obtained most of the information about us from our lawyer, who went to the Burlington Arcade to make enquiries. Forbes, however, knew nothing about Kwong Heisu."

Brimmer proceeded: "With the jewels which we took from the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions was a diamond tinted almost to ruby redness . . a blood diamond. That diamond is known as the 'Light of Buddha'. Roughly, it is worth half a million sterling. The murder of Richard Anthony was not so much an act of vengeance for the pilaging of the temple, as the first step by Kwong Heisu towards the recovery of the diamond."

"I can quite understand that," Spink said. "Naturally, he would know that you still have it, even after losing trace of you all these years."

"How would he know that?" Norton asked.

"A diamond like that . . it must be a large one, besides its peculiar tint which makes it more valuable, to be worth anything like £500,000 . . could hardly pass into another person's hands without exciting a certain amount of comment in the press," Spink stated his conviction. "Even if you disposed of it through irregular channels it would come to light again, for no fence would buy it to keep it. A diamond like that is one thing that can't be lost sight of indefinitely. Did you part with the rest of the jewels?"

"We had to, as we required cash."

"You didn't try to dispose of the 'Light of Buddha'?"

"There were several reasons against it," Norton answered. "You have mentioned one of them. In no market where we could offer it without exciting adverse comment could we have disposed of it advantageously . . where it would have fetched even a tenth of its value. But there was eventually a stronger reason than that; the diamond, for a long time at any rate, proved to be lucky."

"In what way?"

"In Mexico, where we were, diamonds . . especially the tinted kinds . . are used instead of divining sticks for the location of precious metals, silver particularly. Without stopping to explain now what that is," Beauchamp was speaking, "they exhibit a strange reaction in the presence of large quantities of silver. It was with the aid of the 'Light of Buddha', when we were practically penniless again, that we discovered the silver mine which made our fortunes."

"You haven't tried to dispose of it since you came to England?"

"No. If we had, we could more readily understand how Kwong Heisu managed to trace us," Norton answered.

— "And we wouldn't dispose of it now," Beauchamp added "That diamond has become, if you can understand my meaning, an integral part of our partnership. And, speaking for myself personally, I would rather part with life than part with it."

"The 'Light of Buddha'," Spink mused, "by the articles of your tontine agreement, becomes the property of the ultimate survivor, doesn't it?"

"It does."

"And, meanwhile, provides a remarkable incentive to murder," Spink went on.

"What do you mean?" they demanded together.

"I am looking at the case analytically," Spink answered. "Pardon me, gentlemen, but I am not surprised that Inspector Dalglish does not believe your story about such a mysterious person as Kwong Heisu, all the while . . ."

"Inspector Dalglish knows nothing about the diamond,"

Beauchamp interrupted him. "We told him everything but that. And that is one thing you have got to keep under your hat, Mr. Spink . . . that there is such a diamond existing at all. So far as secrecy about that is concerned, we have already argued the pros and cons ourselves. There is only one person by whom mention of it might be made to Scotland Yard, and that is Kwong Heisu. And he will never mention it, because, with one clear case of murder against him, he will never allow himself to be taken alive.

"You look half suspicious of us yourself," he continued. He had been watching the expressions that had passed over Spink's face, and in one of them had correctly read the fact that the detective almost wished he had not been so ready to promise to assist them, "but there is another point which you seem to overlook. There is a vast difference between being willing to risk one's own life for the possession of such a diamond, and the actual killing of someone else to possess it. Further, the only ground Scotland Yard can have for its suspicions of us is the fact of our tontine agreement, and we are each independently wealthy enough to defeat any argument on that ground. Beyond that again, we are not offering you ten thousand pounds either to protect us from Scotland Yard, or to work up an elaborate case of innocence for us. We are offering it to you to protect us against that fiend Kwong Heisu, in the hope that you can trap him before he perpetrates any further mischief. That should be clear now."

"It is," Spink said. "Am I to understand that Richard Anthony was the custodian of the diamond, or that Kwong Heisu has merely made a first selection?"

"He was the custodian of the diamond. How Kwong Heisu came to know that is a mystery to us. Perhaps, as you say, it was only a first selection. We had Mr. Forbes draw up four almost identical wills, one for each of us, according to the terms of our agreement. As we told you, this much Scotland Yard knows. We three are jointly and severally heirs to Dick Anthony's estate. If it had been one of us who had been murdered, he would have taken that one's position. Then the difficulty concerning the diamond cropped up. It was quite obvious we could not all hold it. So we drew lots for its temporary possession, on the understanding that he who drew the marked paper would place it in some safe place known only to himself. We devised a code, the key to which was simple enough to remember easily. In the event of his death, Anthony was to leave a message concerning the diamond, written in that code, in his safe."

"You expected him to die suddenly?" Spink queried.

"There was a possibility of it. He had developed a slight valvular weakness after contracting malaria."

"Then you knew the combination of the safe?"

"Yes. If death occurred in any other way, we should have had unrestrained freedom of access to the safe. Now, with Scotland Yard there before we knew anything of it . . ."

"Have none of you been there since?"

"Yes; I have," Beauchamp told Spink.

"And you failed to find the message?"

"For a good reason. Kwong Heisu had taken it."

"How do you know it wasn't Scotland Yard?"

"Because it was returned to Mr. Brimmer at this address today."

"Was there a message with it?" Spink asked.

"None whatever," Brimmer answered. "The code message alone was put into an envelope and mailed. Here it is. You can see the whole thing yourself."

Spink took the envelope Brimmer handed to him. He examined it carefully . . . an ordinary, cheap envelope, posted on Ludgate Hill. The only thing it presented in the way of a clue might be contained in the typewritten address. Before Spink could comment on this, Brimmer observed: "The code message is inside. Perhaps you would like to look at that too."

Accepting the invitation, the detective extracted it from the envelope. The message was a conglomeration of letters and numerals mixed, as follows:

4ggajigbseijlhw5nnikkj8tOoikdog37bkdg4khgj7
ngfl4sjwl6rzOolcwsdkjsldwidt8q9

"Besides giving the special combination of the safety deposit box where the diamond is," Brimmer continued, "it also gives the address of the Safety Vault Company with whom it is rented. We checked up on that by telephoning the Company."

Spink looked up. "From what you have said," he remarked, "I understand that you have never seen this message before."

"None of us had ever set eyes on it," Norton replied. "We held it as an additional safeguard . . . if only one of our number knew of the actual place of concealment of the diamond."

"Then, of course," Spink surprised them, "you wouldn't

be in a position to know that this might only be a copy."

"Why do you suggest that?" Beauchamp asked him.

Instead of answering the question immediately, Spink asked: "Did Mr. Anthony possess a typewriter?"

"Why . . . no," Beauchamp answered.

"Yet you expected the message to be typewritten?"

"We hadn't thought of that. He could easily have had it done, as the message wouldn't convey a meaning to anybody."

"You wouldn't suggest that he had it already in the envelope addressed to Mr. Brimmer?"

"What are you driving at?" Beauchamp asked, rather testily.

"I am trying to ascertain if my own conclusions are correct," Spink answered. "Apparently they are."

"And . . . ?"

"I am convinced that this is a copy . . . not the original," Spink said. "This envelope has not been steamed. Found sealed, it would naturally have been opened by the person who took it, to see what it contained. Then again, both the message and the envelope were typed on the same machine . . . I should say, from the ink impressions, at the same time . . . an old Smith, double keyboard, with three of the letters at least out of alignment."

Both Norton and Beauchamp jumped up. The same thought had occurred to each of them. Perhaps, after all, Brimmer had not been singled out as the recipient of Kwong Heisu's warning.

"There is probably a copy for us at our homes," Norton said uneasily "I'll ascertain."

He crossed the room to the telephone, and requested his house number.

"Mr. Norton speaking," he said to the servant who answered the call. "Is the afternoon mail in?"

"Yes, sir."

"What letters are there?"

"Just one, sir."

"Is the address typewritten, posted on Ludgate Hill?"

"I'll look, sir, if you will hold the line."

A moment later Norton hung up the receiver. The agitated face he turned towards the others answered his own question over the phone, though he said: "Yes, it is there. What about you, Cliff?"

"No reason why I should be left out," Beauchamp answered gloomily.

Spink broke the silence that followed. "You said just now, Mr. Beauchamp, that this message would not suggest an intelligent meaning to anybody," he observed. "I think you are wrong. If Kwong Heisu is anything of an expert at reading codes, he doubtless knows the secret of the original, and the hiding place of the diamond."

"You think it could be deciphered so easily?" Brimmer exclaimed.

"Such codes as this, with letters and numbers mixed, usually signify a ten-letter transposition, to accommodate the numbers," Spink answered. "There is a keyword of ten letters. There are dozens of them to choose from, such as coldstream, bivouacker, forestwalk, and so on. Working on various principles used in deciphering codes, it would not be difficult to establish the keyword. If you would like me

to show you, gentlemen, I think I could read that message inside of ten minutes."

"Show us!" Beauchamp said grimly.

Spink took a piece of paper and started pencilling as he explained: "One thing that would assist Kwong Heisu would be the assumption that this refers to the 'Light of Buddha', as he knows the diamond. And I have one distinct advantage over him. I know that it also refers to a safety deposit box somewhere. To save time, I am going to work upon that, although with time that wouldn't make any material difference. In the first place, although it could be placed anywhere, I am going to assume that the keyword is at the beginning. That gives me this:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz

"The top line gives the letters and numerals in their proper consecutive order, the bottom line represents the code with the figures omitted, to be filled in as discovered. In the message 'g' is a common letter, and occurs doubled right at the beginning. According to set tables, 'e' is the most frequent letter, and 'e' is the vowel most commonly doubled. I am going to assume that 'g' represents 'e', and substitute the rest as they stand. This is what I get, omitting all numerals:

4ggajigbseijlhw5nnikkj8tOoikdog37bkdg4khgj7
eektsel ost r xxsuut ysunyq lune uret
ngfl4sjwl6rzOolcwskjsldwidt8qg
xep zt y m nut n sn

"It doesn't look very intelligible yet," Spink went on, "but here is where I introduce a little supposition, aided by the information you have given me. I am going to assume that the first word is 'seek' and the next word 'the'. With three letters between 'l' and 't', one might reasonably suppose that to be 'light'. If it is, the following two words are 'of Buddha'. Farther on, we have 'lune'. Possibly that is 'lane', if so, the word in front is 'Chancery', because there is a well-known safety deposit vault located there, supplying 's' every time '4' appears, 'h' for 'i', and the other letters as they occur in the words suggested. We have now:

4ggajigbseijlhw5nnikkj8tOoikdog37bkdg4khgj7
seekthelightofBuddhaat ChanceryLanesafety

ngfl4sjwl6rzOolcwskjsldwidt8q9
depositbo combinationbhn

And the code with key stands:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
kwongheis abcdlf 34j5lm 7pqr t v xyz

"The rest isn't very difficult, is it?" Spink smiled. "Completing your code word of 'Kwong Heisu', and supplying the missing numerals, the complete key becomes:

abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz1234567890
kwongheisuabcdlf234j5lm67pqr8t9vOxyz

"With practically the same facilities, Kwong Heisu will have discovered that the diamond is at 347 Chancery Lane, in box 207, with combination BHN4315. Doubtless, as you say, he expects you to take possession of it, and . . ."

"Make it an excuse for another scorpion murder," Brimmer grumbled.


"He probably realizes it would be more difficult for him to get it than for an Englishman," Spink said.

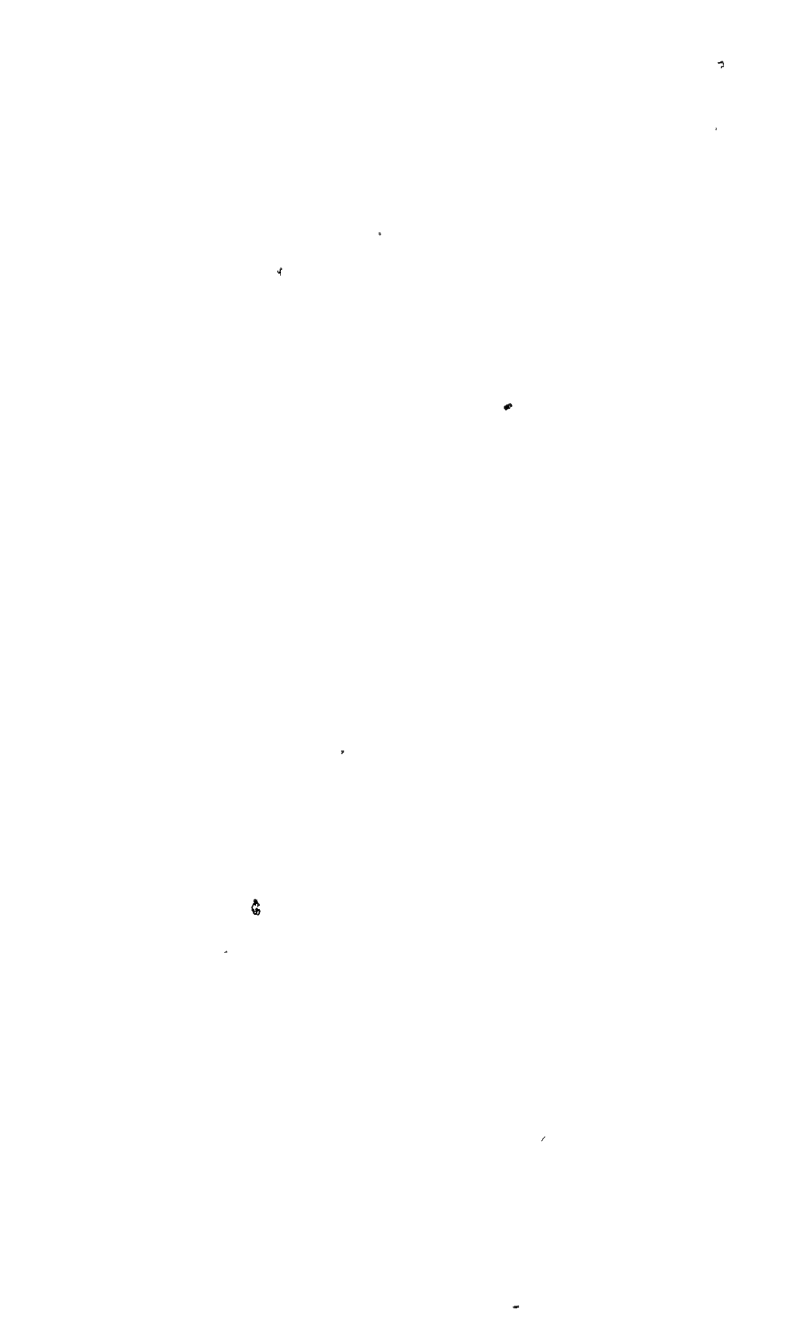
"How do you mean . . . an Englishman could get it?" Beauchamp asked him, in subdued excitement. "Mr. Brimmer here phoned the safety vault people, and they say it can't be touched except by a duly authorized person with proof of probate of the will."

"That's all right," Spink replied. "Otherwise, it wouldn't be so difficult as you seem to imagine. Of course, there would be a considerable amount of risk, but what is there to prevent him . . . outside of his nationality . . . from renting a box as near to No. 207 as possible? Anyone can rent a box there on production of satisfactory bank references. The whole thing, it seems to me, hinges on knowledge of the combination of No. 207. Besides, if you don't get it soon, he probably will take the risk himself."

"But . . . the vault attendant?" Beauchamp argued.

"He could seize on an opportunity when the man's attention was engaged elsewhere. Failing that, I don't think he is the man to allow an attendant to stand in his way. Apparently, however, he hasn't thought of the means of getting it yet, so I think I'll devote some attention to Chancery Lane. I may be able to pick up his trail there."

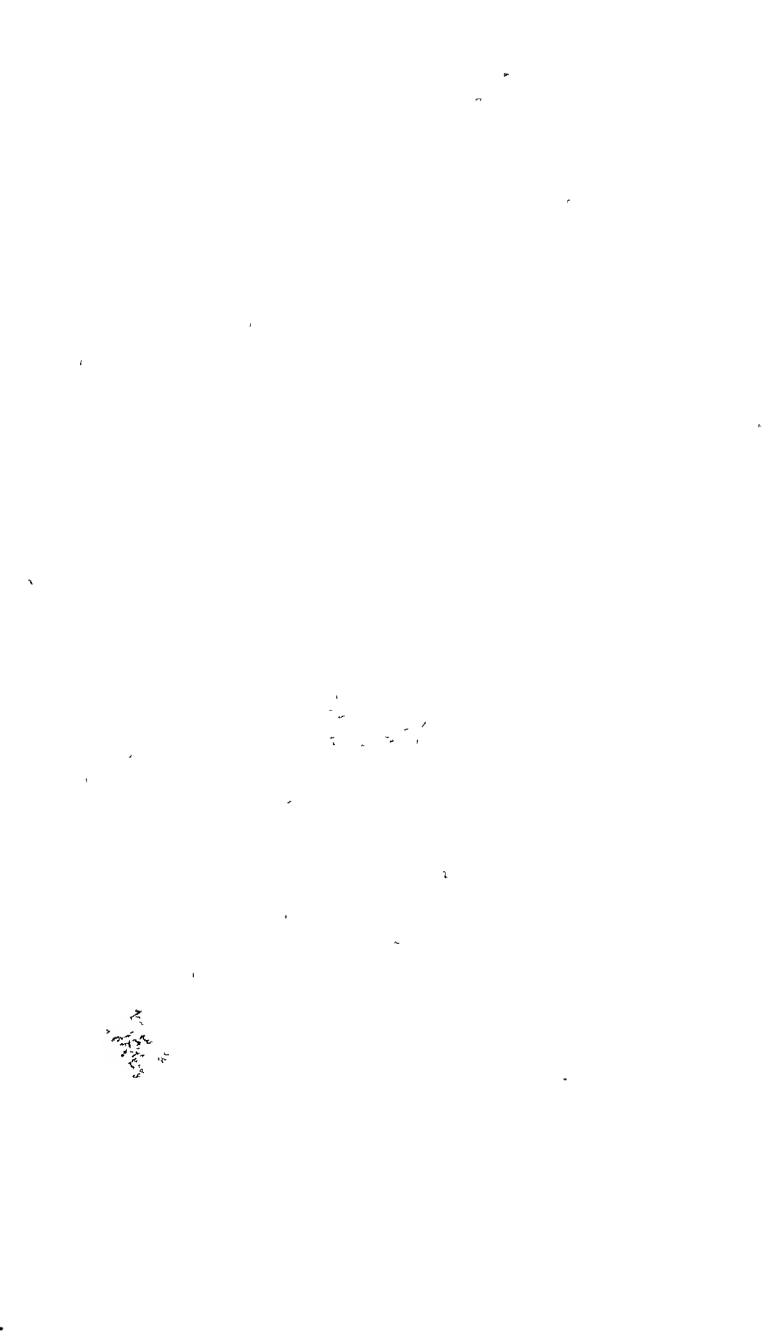




THE SCORPION

CHAPTER VII

SPINK COMPARES NOTES WITH
BROOKS & DALGLEISH



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SPINK COMPARES NOTES WITH BROOKS AND DALGLEISH

LEAVING the Brimmer residence, Spink almost collided with Inspector Dalglish. Knowing it was impossible to avoid recognition, Spink stopped. Besides, the encounter might prove fortunate, for he was embarked upon an investigation in which he would ultimately require the official sanction of Scotland Yard. Foremost in his mind was the hope that he might be allowed to look for clues in the dead man's residence before anything was removed. And it was as well to find out at the start whether Scotland Yard would demonstrate antagonism towards private enquiry, as the job he was engaged upon was strictly within the realm of police authority. Inspector Dalglish, who had stopped too on seeing him, introduced the question himself.

"Hullo, Spink!" he said. "I heard you were visiting our friend Brimmer. Thought I would let you get a good line-up of the case before I intruded. So Richard Anthony's friends are starting a private enquiry?"

"Yes, they have just given me such a commission," Spink answered. "From what you say, I hope you will raise no official objection."

"There is no reason why I should, if we can manage to work in harmony," Dalglish said. "That is up to you, Spink. If we start treading on each other's toes, you know as well as I do that you may be requested to leave the affair alone. As it is, there's lots of room in this case for teamwork. Personally, I am inclined to welcome any assistance in getting to the bottom of it, so go ahead and get what information you can."

"Thanks, Inspector," Spink replied. "If you have no objection, I should like a peep inside Richard Anthony's flat."

"Sure thing," Dalglish returned cordially. "You may be lucky enough to discover something we've missed, though we have the place pretty well combed through."

He took a card from his pocket, and wrote on it. "Show that to the man guarding the front door," he said. "He'll admit you. You know Brooks, don't you? He's there in charge. I have written on the card that he is to give you a free hand. He'll do it. I am coming along there myself shortly. I probably have you to thank for my finding all three men I want to see here."

"Yes," Spink said. "I observe you have them pretty well covered. On my way in I noticed Hollis, Gibbs, and . . ."

"They are too important to lose sight of yet," Dalglish interrupted him. "Just now I want to warn them all personally to attend the inquest at Scotland Yard tomorrow morning. I omitted that when I saw them before. See you later, Spink!"

It occurred to Spink that there was something suggestive

in the inspector's marked cordiality. Dalglish was one official with whom he had not always rubbed shoulders as pleasantly as he would have liked. Knowledge of the diamond gave Spink an idea as to what that something might be. With that on his own mind, it was easy to conjecture that the Scotland Yard official was suspicious of the fact that Anthony's friends were withholding important information which they might have given to their own enquiry agent. Spink warned himself that he would have to be careful.

He walked to the first corner, hailed a taxi, and gave the driver orders to proceed as quickly as possible to the Burlington Arcade. Whatever his reason, he appreciated the concession the inspector had granted him. At the same time, the fact that Dalglish would be sharp on his heels made it expedient to utilize the short interval to the best advantage.

Showing Dalglish's card to the policeman on duty at the front door, he was admitted immediately. Inside he encountered Detective-Sergeant Brooks, who received him with more condescension than cordiality. However, Brooks could not go behind his superior's orders, so he instructed the plain-clothes men in the nearest rooms to let Spink have a free hand, and then removed himself to the far end of the apartment as a further expression of his disapproval.

Encountering Scotland Yard men everywhere, Spink was surprised at the evidence of such unusual precautions. The thing that struck him most forcibly in that connection was that Scotland Yard might, beneath the surface, not be so sure of Tomkins's suicide. Evidently it was an assumption based upon lack of sufficient evidence to the contrary. Brim-

mer and the other two might yet be right in assuming that Tomkins was actually murdered, right under the noses of the Scotland Yard officials. There was something very peculiar, very mysterious in Tomkins's story about the masked Chinaman.

Spink found himself handicapped by the presence of so many witnesses of his search. No matter where he went, there was someone to watch him. He began again to be suspicious of the inspector's unusual cordiality in responding to his request. Dalgleish had suggested by his manner that he thought all three of his clients were holding something back. Perhaps his talk about teamwork was nothing but a plant. Perhaps he hoped that Spink, possessing information which he had not, might inadvertently reveal what it was to the eyes watching his movements. Dalgleish could easily have warned Brooks by telephone that he was coming. Spink again warned himself to be careful. The main thing was to go about his task as if unconscious of the fact that he was being watched.

Of one thing he was certain. There was little to be found by devoting his time to the contents of the safe. Anthony's code message had been removed, so there was nothing there which would help towards a solution of the mystery of Kwong Heisu. For the sake of appearances he gave it a cursory once-over. Somehow he felt that in Tomkins's death was the solution to the case. It was in the kitchen that Tomkins had died, so Spink took himself there as speedily as he could.

There he met Detective-Sergeant Brooks again. The sergeant had recovered somewhat from his first exhibition of

displeasure, and was more inclined to be reasonable. He even answered Spink's questions without any show of reluctance. He saw Spink examining the stain on the floor where the second scorpion had been squashed, and volunteered information as to what it was.

"Funny way to commit suicide," Spink commented then.

"The whole affair is damned queer, if you ask me anything," Brooks replied.

"You mean . . . that Tomkins should try to deepen the mystery by suggesting that he was murdered?"

"He didn't actually suggest that," Brooks answered quickly. "All he said was, 'The masked Chinaman is . . . !' "

"Implying, of course, that he knew his identity."

"Yes."

"Dying men don't usually tell lies . . . to screen anybody," Spink observed. "You must have thought at first that there was something in it."

"Naturally," Brooks said. "Like us, you would have found it a blood-curdling moment . . . thinking that a murderous Chinaman was still at large in the apartment."

"Uncanny," Spink remarked.

"But there wasn't a vestige of a chance," Brooks went on. "The only two exits were already guarded, and we turned the place inside out before we satisfied ourselves. Personally, I believe there was something in what Tomkins said about being hypnotized. You know, you've seen things like that yourself. You must have. In the music halls, I mean . . . these illusionists. Saw a man do something like it myself once . . . fellow who was hypnotized," Brooks continued. He had, since Dalgleish had left, been giving the

subject serious consideration. "The chap who hypnotized him told him when he woke up, the first time he saw a broom, he'd start cuddling it. It was at the Wood Green Empire. The next act contained a housekeeping scene. Before the attendants could stop him . . or pretend to . . the fellow who had been hypnotized rushed up on the stage again, grabbed the broom, and . . ."

"Yes, I've seen something like it," Spink encouraged him. "But . . . I wonder!"

"You wonder what?"

"Suppose, instead of a broom, the fellow hypnotizing him had suggested a cobra, and the next act had been a snake-charming act . . or suppose there had been something about scorpions . . I wonder."

"And wondering don't seem out of place to me," Brooks replied. "You've let yourself in on a puzzle, but go ahead and find the solution. But there's one thing I do know, no matter what Tomkins's idea was. There was no masked Chinaman here when he died. In a private residence, with no trap doors like there are on the stage . . or revolving cupboards, human beings can't disappear like they do at Maskelyne and Devant's."

Spink agreed with him. "As you say, this isn't the St. George's Hall of Mystery," he said. "There must be more in this hypnotism stuff than I ever thought there was."

"Or me," Brooks said.

Spink glanced around the kitchen, noticed a mirror, and enquired: "Which way was Tomkins lying, Sergeant?"

Brooks indicated a position which would bring the valet's

head towards the mirror, and his feet towards the door opening on to the corridor.

"On his back?" Spink asked.

"Yes. What are you thinking?"

"Supposing, just for the sake of argument, Tomkins was standing facing the door. The Chinaman, if he *was* here, could have approached him from *that* door unobserved." Spink indicated the door leading into the maid's bedroom. "What room is in there?"

Brooks told him, in a rather disgruntled manner. He didn't like the reiteration about the possible presence of the masked Chinaman. However, Spink continued, without noticing that fact ostentatiously: "Which seems to me to be the most logical place for concealment."

"Same kind of theory we tried to puzzle out," Brooks conceded. "And he could have come from any of the doors equally well, because Tomkins was facing none of them."

"How do you know that?"

"He came into the kitchen to get a drink, in which case he would be facing the kitchen sink, where his glass is."

Spink walked over to the glass and picked it up. Then he turned to the Detective-Sergeant with a puzzled expression.

"The glass hasn't been used," he mused. "I wonder why he didn't take his drink."

Brooks crossed to him. "That's a point we hadn't noticed," he said.

"The strongest evidence yet of suicide," Spink continued. "Doubtless the drink was first in his mind, hence the glass. He couldn't have been surprised with it in his hand, for in

that case he wouldn't stop to put it so nicely where it is. More probably it would have crashed from his hand to the floor, and given you quicker warning. By the way," he went on abruptly, "you say that door leads to a corridor running the full length of the apartment?"

"Yes; from the front hall to the fire escape."

"There was nobody in that corridor at the time . . . no one who could have observed if a person went through the door?"

"Only Inspector Dalglish and I were here, with the exception of Dr. Gleason," Brooks answered. "It was about that time that he came back for something he had left. He would be the only person who could have seen along the corridor. But it's of no use arguing along that track any longer," Brooks showed annoyance in his voice. "The only way out from the corridor would be either by the front door or the fire escape, and both those doors were guarded."

"It certainly is a puzzle," Spink said thoughtfully. He went back again into the library, and examined for the second time the finger impressions on the knob of the safe with a lens.

In a minute or so Inspector Dalglish came in. He introduced his thoughts without any preamble.

"If we are going to work in conjunction, we had better have a heart to heart talk right at the beginning," he said. "Confidentially, Spink, how much of their story did Messrs. Brimmer and Company tell you?"

"In their own words, Inspector, they gave me the full information as they had given it to you, without any reticence

concerning their association with Richard Anthony," Spink told him. "I heard all about Kwong Heisu, masked High Priest of the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions, and of the jewels they purloined from him in Shensi. Of course, they maintain that their act in confiscating the jewels was one of just retaliation, and . . ."

"They would," Dalglish grunted. "And perhaps it was, though you would need to get this Kwong Heisu's story before you would be prepared to swear to it. As a matter of fact, Spink, between ourselves, I think the Kwong Heisu story was either over-done or under-done. I can't seem to get it into perfect equilibrium. For one thing, it took him thirty years to find them, and yet he was prepared to act immediately, with his scorpions and so on, when he did find them. If he had been waiting in England, how did he feed the damned things? Your impressions may not coincide with mine, Spink, but if we are going to pull off any teamwork, we have got to understand each other. I tell you right now that I am not only dubious about the Kwong Heisu part of the story, but I am doubtful of Brimmer and his friends. They told you, I suppose, that outside of themselves, with their tontine agreement, there are no other heirs to Anthony's estate of half a million?"

"Yes, they told me that," Spink answered, thinking it very evident again, from his present attitude of good-fellowship, that Dalglish was trying to pump information. Spink thought of the diamond worth another half million. He said: "Which means, however, not more than thirty-three and a third percent added to what they now have."

"Quite so," Dalglish agreed reluctantly, "but you should

also figure on the sum the final survivor is going to be worth. Now, I put it to you, Spink. They might not all be concerned, but it would strike any intelligence that one of the surviving three might somehow be interested in acquiring the aggregate wealth of all."

"That is, of course, eliminating the masked Chinaman's interest altogether," Spink suggested. "Whatever suspicions you may think point to the others, he is not altogether a product of their combined imagination."

"Agreed," Dalgleish said. "Admitting that there must have been some foundation to their story about the temple they robbed, it still seems to me that Kwong Heisu would be advertising himself too patently by his method . . . if he still exists."

"You mean . . . with regard to the scorpions?"

"Yes. And wearing his official mask."

"Your idea then is that someone else was wearing it?"

"My idea is that someone else could," Dalgleish answered. "From the description they have given me of Kwong Heisu as they last saw him, he wouldn't require any mask to re-establish his identity in their minds."

"Yet a person taking his place would still have the same difficulty in obtaining the scorpions, as you mentioned yourself," Spink argued.

"Perhaps not the same difficulty," Dalgleish returned. "A Chinaman might have difficulty in introducing them into the country . . . more difficulty than an Englishman. The Chinaman would be a natural suspect, I mean with regard to smuggling something. The Englishman might get away with it. Besides, for that matter, I can't discover that there

is much difference between the Mexican scorpions and the Chinese."

"Who said they were Chinese?" Spink asked quietly.

"Dr. Gleason."

"Oh!"

It was hardly an exclamation, just a more intense breathing. Inspector Dalglish looked up quickly, but Spink continued with the question: "Are the Mexican scorpions supposed to be as poisonous as the others?"

"There's not much difference, I believe," the inspector answered. He added: "So far as that goes, it wouldn't matter where the scorpions came from, whether they were poisonous or not. It wasn't the venom of the scorpions that killed either Anthony or Tomkins. There was some other poison smeared on their claws."

"Oh!" Spink breathed again.

Dalglish affected not to notice this, and continued: "Admitting the hand of Kwong Heisu, and considering the whole thing as possibly an act of vengeance for their pillaging of his temple, so far as I understand the Oriental mind, his method would be more subtle, leaving more to the imagination. You must admit that, if it is not conclusive, the idea of employing the scorpions is more than suggestive. It is picturesque . . . so much so that it seems to be substantiating too powerful an alibi. Then again, what was the motive of Tomkins's suicide?"

"Your gruelling may have had something to do with it," Spink said candidly. "You know, Inspector, you are credited with employing third degree methods. Of course, even that

should not alarm anyone who was not actually an accomplice."

"Exactly," Dalglish exclaimed. "I didn't gruel him enough to alarm him like that. All I did was to compare his finger-prints with those that were left on the knob of the safe. When he said to me that he was starting to remember, I didn't even badger him to assist his returning memory. I left him strictly alone, with instructions only to tell me immediately he remembered anything distinct. And here is another point that puzzles me. If I alarmed him into believing I suspected him, we are up against the picturesque again. He could have used means in his self-destruction that were not so terror-inspiring. But to pick up a scorpion, and clamp it against his own throat!"

"Yes, it is a puzzle," Spink said. "But for the conclusive evidence you have produced that he couldn't have been murdered, I should distinctly refuse to believe that he suicided."

"There's no question about it," Dalglish returned. "Now I ask you this: whatever the means he intended to use, why should he, with no apparent gain to himself, kill himself to protect a Chinaman who was previously unknown to him, yet was clearly the bitter enemy of his master? It was not to protect any Chink," the inspector went on, without giving Spink time to answer his question. "He killed himself because he knew who murdered Anthony, as his struggling return to memory showed, and because he was afraid he would have to face the inevitable enquiry. Believe me, when we get to the bottom of this, we shall discover that Anthony was murdered by someone who had a greater interest than revenge."

"You may be right, Inspector, yet I should imagine an Oriental would be very fanatical where anything approaching sacrilege is concerned. If any part of their story is true, the nucleus of their present wealth certainly came from the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions . . . its source was the jewels they admit they stole. Kwong Heisu may not only have been seeking revenge. There is enough evidence in this litter to prove that he was searching assiduously for something, why not because he believed they still held some of the jewels?"

"That sounds feasible enough, Spink; but let me tell you this. There was something that Richard Anthony had that one at least of his erstwhile partners wanted."

Spink wondered how much nearer Dalgleish would come to the truth, as the inspector continued: "I thought it would be a good plan to get one of them here to discover if anything of Anthony's was missing. It was Beauchamp who came, and his attempt to ascertain if anything of value was missing ended in a frantic search for something he couldn't find."

After a moment's thought, Spink argued: "Well, that seems to eliminate Beauchamp as the murderer of Anthony, doesn't it?"

"How is that?"

"If he had murdered Anthony because of that something you imagine must be missing, he would have taken it at the time of the murder, don't you think?"

"Unless he was disturbed before he found it, and took the chance of coming back with me."

Spink thought he would feel more comfortable if the sub-

ject were changed, so he remarked: "By the way, Inspector, there is one point I discovered which may add colour to the theory of Tomkins's suicide, though actually I don't think it does. Tomkins didn't take the drink for which he went to the kitchen."

"He didn't?" Dalglish queried.

"No. The glass he went to use is perfectly dry. It hasn't been used, in fact."

"I hadn't noticed that," Dalglish admitted, rather curtly. "Whether the fact that he didn't take a drink adds colour to the theory of his suicide or not doesn't make a great deal of difference, however. The fact of his suicide has been pretty well established. Sir Basil Coyne clinched any argument against that when he remarked, that with Tomkins presumably under hypnotic control, not even a Chinaman would be fool enough to remain here until we arrived for the sake of being spectacular."

"Then Sir Basil Coyne admits the existence of Kwong Heisu?"

"Not exactly. His emphasis was upon the spectacular phase of the subject."

"Then I would adduce the same argument in favor of my clients," Spink said quickly.

"Why?" Dalglish demanded.

"Away in Mexico, in the environment of a silver mine where legitimate accidents might happen at any time, with not many questions asked, was the only logical place for the elimination of any of the tontine partners. The one you think murdered Richard Anthony would hardly, for the

sake of newspaper headlines, wait to do it until he had placed himself within the reach of Scotland Yard."

"I suppose you have an equally clever argument to justify your belief that Tomkins didn't commit suicide," Dalglish remarked sarcastically.

"Well, apart from the well-established physical impossibility of murder, I find far more evidence of murder than of suicide," Spink returned quietly.

"You do, eh?"

"I do. In fact, I have found evidence that Kwong Heisu . . . or whoever murdered Richard Anthony . . . was here when Tomkins died."

Without waiting for Dalglish to reply, Spink walked into the kitchen, and came back holding the tumbler very carefully on the palm of his hand.

"Here is where the fact that Tomkins didn't take a drink adds nothing but *apparent* colour to the theory of his suicide," he said. "Logically, if he was seized from behind in the act of leaning towards the water tap, this glass would have been shattered in the sink. The only thing that could prevent that was for the murderer, at the same time he placed the scorpion at his throat, to catch the glass before it fell."

"To hell you say!" the inspector exclaimed, visibly perturbed at the revelation he felt was coming.

Spink stepped past him, and compared some finger-prints on the glass with those on the knob of the safe. When he got up, he said: "Tomkins was murdered all right! There are two sets of finger-prints on this glass. One of them may

have been made by Tomkins; the other was made by the individual who operated this safe combination!"

For a moment or two Inspector Dalglish was staggered at this daring attempt to set aside the Chief of Scotland Yard's convictions. Then he laughed, ironically. "Very clever, Spink," he said, "but let me point out one thing you also are forgetting. It is quite logical that one set of fingerprints on the glass would be made by Tomkins . . . or by one of the day maids. Even if made by Tomkins, it was not necessarily at the time of his death. And there is no reason why the murderer of Richard Anthony should not have touched the glass . . . perhaps thinking for a moment to take a drink himself . . . before he left the apartment after committing the murder."

"Then all I can suggest is that you take the finger impressions of Beauchamp, Brimmer and Norton without delay," Spink returned bitingly. "You can in that way easily satisfy yourself as to whether any one of them was here last night or not. Personally, I am strongly in favor of Kwong Heisu."

"I wish you luck in finding him, then," Dalglish replied.

THE SCORPION

CHAPTER VIII

THE TRANSFER OF THE DIAMOND



CHAPTER VIII

THE TRANSFER OF THE DIAMOND

THROUGH the library window, Brimmer and his friends had seen Spink talking to Inspector Dalglish. However, as Spink had informed them that it was inevitable that Scotland Yard would become informed of his activities, that caused them more annoyance than worry at the time. When Dalglish entered, he tried to set their minds at rest.

"I don't blame you for looking after your own interests, gentlemen," he said urbanely. "You have chosen a good representative in Mr. Spink. He has given us valuable assistance on several occasions. I have just been talking to him outside, and he tells me you have commissioned him specifically to find your Chinaman, Kwong Heisu."

"Does that mean that you now believe there was substance in what we told you?" Norton asked him.

"I have no doubt there was a good deal of substance in it," Dalglish said. "You would hardly admit the theft of the jewels without there being some foundation."

"Theft, you said?" Brimmer showed his annoyance at the word.

"There are many fancy names for it," Dalglish an-

swered drily. "Being a man of plain language, I use the word theft. It is a generic term, and embraces them all."

"Then you make no allowance for our own position at the time?" Beauchamp expostulated.

"Having heard nothing but your side of the question, I am hardly in a position to judge," the inspector answered. "As a matter of fact, I couldn't make any allowances. You took the law into your own hands, and that in itself . . ."

"As conditions were in China then, we should have stood little chance of obtaining redress in any other way," Norton interrupted him.

"Suppose we modify the expression, and speak of your looting the temple, if you like that better," Dalgleish ceded.

"If a just act of retaliation can be so described," Beauchamp returned.

"When it comes to that, Kwong Heisu might consider the murder of Richard Anthony an act of just retaliation," the inspector replied. "Left to itself, the thing might go on indefinitely. You might do harm again to Kwong Heisu, under the same incentive. He might again retaliate . . . make an endless vendetta of it, or something like that. I don't say you were not justified, in the first instance. That is a matter that doesn't concern us. In England there is a law against murder, no matter what the motive or incentive, and the actual murder of Richard Anthony is what we are interested in."

"Then you at least place some credence in our story?" Brimmer asked him.

"Of course. Your friend wouldn't have been murdered for nothing. Indeed, I am placing so much credence in

your story that I have just given Mr. Spink one of my cards to admit him into Richard Anthony's flat. His methods are not quite the same as ours, and he may discover something we have overlooked."

"You think that is possible?" Beauchamp asked him, surprised. "Remember, I was there too, and found nothing."

"Pardon me for suggesting such a thing," Dalglish returned drily, "but his will be the third of three distinct interests at work. Our interest is purely for the elucidation of crime; his, in looking for clues, is purely professional . . . paid professionalism; with yours, I take it, there was a certain amount of sentimentality attached."

"Certainly," Norton said quickly.

"Coupled with a certain amount of fear," Dalglish went on.

"We have explained why," Brimmer retorted sharply. "If you are suggesting any other form of fear . . ."

"Our instructions to Mr. Spink were to locate Kwong Heisu," Norton added, as Brimmer did not complete his sentence. "Our explanation to him was that we were not paying him to protect us from Scotland Yard."

"Assuming you are innocent, you need no such protection," the inspector stated. "In the eyes of the law everyone is innocent . . . until he is proved guilty."

"Which doesn't remove from us the onus of being suspected," Beauchamp observed warmly. "You would hardly tell us, I suppose, that Scotland Yard is having us shadowed for the purpose of protecting us from the murderer of Dick Anthony?"

"Hardly shadowed, gentlemen," Dalglish protested.

"Watched, then. We also like to speak in plain language."

"At present, as I explained, it is imperative that you remain in London," Dalglish said.

"So far as being material witnesses is concerned, we were not in Burlington Arcade at the time of the murder," Brimmer retorted. "If you capture Kwong Heisu, there is no reason why we should run away. We should be only too glad to appear to give our evidence, although we could only repeat what we have already told you."

"Unreservedly, I think you have stated."

"Yes. As it is, you persist in holding us here, where we are in imminent danger of our lives from the same source."

"That may not be for long," Dalglish replied. "In fact, my purpose in calling upon you now is to warn you to attend the inquest on your friend at Scotland Yard, at 10.30 tomorrow morning."

"After that, then, we shall be free to go?"

"You are travelling in too big a hurry," Dalglish reminded them. "Everything may depend upon what transpires at the inquest. Just now I won't detain you any longer. Good day, gentlemen!"

He picked up his hat, and permitted Brimmer to escort him to the door.

"Spink is wasting his time if he goes to Dick's apartment," Brimmer observed as he re-entered the library.

"It is something we may turn to good account," Beauchamp replied.

"How?"

Beauchamp's explanation was startling. It at first took

his friends by surprise. Later they acquiesced, never dreaming that he had any ulterior motive in suggesting what he did. Probably he had none at the time, though ideas which had been occurring to him since Spink left them, and during the conversation with Inspector Dalgleish, matured rapidly as he progressed in his scheme.

"I have been thinking over what Spink said . . . about the ease of accessibility to Dick's safety deposit box," he explained. "If Kwong Heisu could do it, so can I. I'm willing to take the risk. And there's every reason why one of us should do it. Suppose Scotland Yard refuses to grant probate of Dick's will. So far as the rest of it is concerned, that doesn't matter to any of us. Our share of his private fortune is of no immediate moment. But it would mean that the safety deposit box, if the secret of it leaked out, might either be forced open by the police, or sealed with an official seal.

"Every moment's delay is going to make the recovery of the 'Light of Buddha' more difficult," he went on. "Spink will be watching Chancery Lane, or, if not, we have placed no restriction upon his employing agents. Later, they may interfere and complicate matters. If the safety deposit box is opened by the police, good-bye to the diamond. On the other hand, if it is opened and found empty, no matter what transpires afterwards, or what Kwong Heisu may reveal, we can easily admit that there was a diamond of value included with the other jewels, but that we disposed of it with the rest."

"How do you propose to set about it?" Brimmer asked him.

"Rent a box in the same deposit vault, under an assumed name, as close to Dick's as I can arrange it. They are sure to have a plan of the vault in the offices of the company. I'll take a bunch of blank papers to cover suspicion. If I can succeed in opening Dick's box without observation, I'll transfer the diamond to it."

"Why not bring it away with you?" Norton suggested.

"It will be safer there, until Kwong Heisu is arrested, and Scotland Yard removes its ban," Beauchamp answered. "It wouldn't be safe for one of us to have it in his possession, in case he should be the next one visited. I have been planning the whole scheme since Spink mentioned the feasibility of it, so I have everything pretty well covered. There is the possibility, of course, that Kwong Heisu will be watching Chancery Lane, but, although he knows our identities, and where we can be found, there is very little probability that he will recognize me among the customers who will be moving in and out. We have all changed considerably in thirty years.

"You heard what Spink said about furnishing banker's references," he continued. "Of course, I cannot very well use my own bankers for that purpose if I am going to use an assumed name; but there is nothing to prevent me from stopping at some bank on the way down, and making a substantial deposit. I have upwards of a thousand pounds on me at the present moment. You two can doubtless embellish that, making a total amount sufficient to satisfy any prejudices."

"It sounds a feasible proposition, Cliff," Brimmer began to get enthusiastic. "The only difficulty, so far as I

can see, is Scotland Yard. You'll be trailed to Chancery Lane as sure as guns."

"I have even thought of a way out of that," Beauchamp replied. "There are two of us, according to what Dalgleish will think, who will be leaving here to proceed to their own residences. I am taking a chance on whether the fellows watching got a good look at me. They were, I hope, more concerned with the license number plates of my car. They are probably watching it now. If two of us leave, they will think they are you, Sam, and me. They will follow to ascertain that we actually go home. If you leave at the same time as Sam, Charlie, taking my car, and going to Brondesbury to wait for me, they'll follow you, some of them, the others following Sam to Ealing. I'll borrow your Daimler, and leave shortly afterwards."

"Sure thing," Brimmer agreed. "Anything that will assist in putting such a plan into execution. But don't forget there will be someone left behind to watch me too. How are you going to get over that?"

Beauchamp considered a moment, then he said: "Williams, my chauffeur, is about your build, Charlie. We'll dress him up to look as nearly like you as possible. He can leave in your little De Dion runabout before I do. If he pulls out of the back lane quickly, he'll get a running start. Before they have discovered their mistake, I'll be able to get away myself. There's a certain amount of risk to it, but, so far as I can see, it's the only way out. What do you say?"

"Agreed to everything," Brimmer answered.

"Same here," Norton acquiesced.

"Then let's get some dummies ready, and make up the biggest parcel of cash we can for deposit."

In ten minutes their arrangements were completed. Watching the others depart, from behind screening curtains, Beauchamp observed the two cars that started in pursuit from the end of the block. Another five minutes, and he despatched Williams, with instructions, once he was clear of Maple Road, to cruise around for half an hour, and then return.

Still watching, he saw a third car pass in front of the house from a parking stand lower down, and apparently take up the trail of Williams. He left by the same way as his chauffeur a minute later. Glancing backwards in the reflector, he turned the corner into High Street, Hammer-smith, with Maple Street clear behind him. Evidently the ruse had worked.

He stopped at the branch of the Capital and Counties Bank at the corner of Henrietta Street in the Strand. He had arrived just a few minutes before closing time. He opened a checking account in the name of James Reynolds, depositing only the £1000 he had in his own possession. He was already thinking of a possible emergency, in which he would need funds. That done, he went at once to 347 Chancery Lane.

Enquiry in the offices of the Safety Vault Company elicited the information that there were several boxes unrented. The clerk he addressed immediately produced a plan of the vault, and upon it the vacant boxes were marked. Not only that, but he saw that the boxes were numbered in columns

from top to bottom, eight in a column, and the second above that containing the diamond, No. 205, was unrented.

Meanwhile the clerk had pushed in front of him an application form. He filled in the name of James Reynolds. When he came to the line for the address he referred to the clerk.

"I have just arrived in London, and am possibly not staying a long time in the City," he said. "I presume it will be satisfactory if I give the address of my bankers, where correspondence will be sent to me."

"Quite all right, Mr. Reynolds," the clerk replied, after glancing at the name. "For how long will you require the box?"

"What is the yearly rental?"

"Twenty-five guineas, sir."

"I'll pay for a year in advance," Beauchamp said. He made out a check for the amount, while the clerk entered what particulars were necessary on the card.

"Thank you, Mr. Reynolds," the clerk said, taking the check. "The vault is absolutely burglar- and fire-proof, so your mind can be at rest with regard to anything you deposit there, no matter how long you may be absent from the City. Our clients have the additional safeguard that the combination of their particular box is known only to them, no record being kept in this office. The vault attendant will show you how to set and operate a combination; after that you can set privately any combination you choose. I would advise, if I may, that you deposit a record of the combination with your bankers or your lawyer. Strange things happen sometimes . . . unexpectedly. There's that murder

of Mr. Richard Anthony, for example. He has a box rented here. Fortunately, from some friends of his, we understand that they know the combination."

"What would happen if they didn't?" Beauchamp asked.

"The lock would have to be cut out with an oxygen-acetylene torch, the whole box having to be replaced."

Beauchamp thought it extremely fortunate that they had communicated with the company. However, he asked, as if the idea of opening the box in such a way displeased him: "Didn't I understand you to say that the vault was absolutely fire-proof and burglar-proof?"

"The vault itself is, sir," the clerk answered readily. "Once the door is closed, nitro-glycerine wouldn't move it. On the other hand, police regulations demand that the boxes be penetrable if necessary. But there is always an attendant there while the vault is open."

Beauchamp expressed his unfelt satisfaction with this arrangement. The clerk conducted him into the vault, and handed him over to the care of the attendant. The latter spent some time in demonstrating various combinations that were available watching him while he set several and operated them. That finished, Beauchamp, wishing the man would leave him alone, though deeming it inexpedient to express the wish, took the packet of dummies from his pocket, and made as if to place them inside. To his relief the attendant stopped him quickly, saying: "I wouldn't advise you to put anything in yet, sir, until you have worked your own combination a few times. If a customer makes a mistake, it is an expensive job getting one of these con-

trappings open and replaced, and the flame might get through to the papers inside."

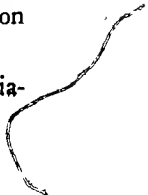
"I hadn't thought of that," Beauchamp replied. Here's a sovereign for yourself. That piece of advice is worth it."

"Thank you, sir," the man said, pocketing the coin gratefully. He added: "Go ahead, sir, and practise all you like. I won't disturb you at all."

After that, Beauchamp found it easier than he had anticipated to accomplish the purpose of his errand. He might have been alone in the vault for all the notice the man took of him, and the close proximity of his box to Anthony's facilitated matters still further. Going through a pretence of setting a combination with one hand, he cautiously operated No. 207 according to the instructions in Anthony's code message. He turned as he felt the door of the box opening in response to the last number. The attendant was not looking. Another second and the box was open. Thrusting in his hand, he extracted the only article that was inside . . the box which he knew contained, or had contained, the 'Light of Buddha'. He closed the safe, and gave the knob a twist which readjusted the combination.

It made more noise than he had bargained for, and for a moment his heart almost stopped beating. But the attendant apparently had not noticed it, and, less timorous now through such unqualified success, Beauchamp even stopped to open the box containing the diamond, to feast his eyes on the stone that had caused the death of his friend, and might even yet be the cause of his . . feasting eyes upon it that became more and more traitorously inclined.

Resting in its bed of cotton-wool, the ruby-tinted dia-



mond emitted rays of light which were almost blood-red in their intensity, making his own blood pulsate madly as he regarded it. With desire to possess it, unrestrained by sentiments of friendship, for the first time in the history of his part-ownership of the 'Light of Buddha', he allowed himself the absorbing thought that he would willingly commit murder for the sole possession of it . . if it were only someone else besides Brimmer and Norton who were concerned. At that even, the fact that they were his friends was now troubling his conscience more perfunctorily. His covetous eyes feasted upon it, while his fingers itched to put it into his pocket. For the moment it was fear of Kwong Heisu, not sentiments of friendship, that restrained him . . that compelled him to adhere to his original purpose. Another moment, and he thrust it into the far recess of his own box. He wondered that the vault attendant could not hear the throbbing of his heart in his throat, and drumming in his ears with the noise of a sledge-hammer, as, after obliterating the identity of James Reynolds by caching inside also his bank pass book and receipt for the safe, he closed the door upon this gem, worth a king's ransom, which had dropped one drop of its ruby-redness as a seal of blood upon Richard Anthony, and from which three more might yet exude as the seals of death upon Brimmer, Norton and himself. It was not until he reached the street that he realized that the perspiration was streaming down his cheeks.

As he made his way northward along Chancery Lane, he was too elated with his success to observe that another car had started simultaneously in the same direction from lower

down the Lane. He had half expected to encounter Spink somewhere along the thoroughfare. Not seeing him, he surmised that the private detective had not yet taken up his post to watch for the advent of Kwong Heisu, supposing the Chinaman had deciphered the code. Besides, there were other thoughts milling in his mind . . . thoughts which had had their birth in Spink's suggestion, and which had matured in the fact that he had left Maple Road, Hammer-smith, free from observation and pursuit.

They were thoughts of flight. If he escaped, and Kwong Heisu wreaked his vengeance upon Brimmer and Norton, he alone would know where the 'Light of Buddha' was concealed. If Spink, or Scotland Yard, trapped Kwong Heisu before he had had time to pay either of them a murderous visit, he could still communicate with them. He had used them to provide means for his own safety, and his conscience was still a trifle uneasy about his treacherous attitude. But, as he persuaded himself, there was nothing in their agreement forbidding any of them to take steps to prolong life, with the object of becoming the final successor in their tontine contract. And, by seeking to evade death at the hands of Kwong Heisu, he was merely taking such steps to safeguard himself, without further endangering their lives, or doing them other intentional injury.

By the time he reached Holborn he had persuaded himself that there was nothing treacherous in his action. He turned westward along Oxford Street, and then northward at Oxford Circus, proceeding along the Tottenham Court Road. Thoughts of possible pursuit hardly occurred to him, though he occasionally scanned the traffic behind, as outlined

in his rear vision mirror. Each time he looked, he became more at ease, for the car which had started behind him in Chancery Lane, though still following, had slackened its pace until it was several hundred yards in the rear. Not having observed it at the start, there was nothing now about it to excite his suspicions.

Apparently the driver of the pursuing vehicle was confident in the knowledge of his quarry's destination, for Beauchamp was following a route familiar to him . . . the route he traversed ordinarily to arrive at his own home, where Brimmer was already awaiting him. At Finsbury Park Corner, however, he drove straight ahead through Tottenham, instead of taking the turning towards Brondesbury.

Here Beauchamp gained a momentary advantage. The driver of the pursuing car, still figuring upon Brondesbury as Beauchamp's destination, and having temporarily lost sight of him on account of the traffic, took the other turning, and was almost in Brondesbury before he realized his mistake. However, instead of retracing his route, he continued straight on, past the Crescent, to make sure, and then turned into the White Hart Lane at Wood Green, where he knew he could step on the gas, besides cutting off a wide corner.

Beauchamp, too, conscious of a burning desire to put London far behind him as speedily as possible, took liberties with the traffic regulations as he reached the northern extremity of Tottenham High Road. He was almost in Waltham Cross before the pursuer caught sight of him again.

Beauchamp had already made up his mind as to the route he would travel. His immediate destination was Harwich, where he hoped to be able to pick up a boat to transfer him

to the Continent without delay. At Waltham Cross, therefore, he turned east at the Four Swans Inn, and took the Chingford Road. Here, more or less in the country, he realized for the first time that he was being followed. He conjectured that Scotland Yard must have had him in view all the time.

At that, Scotland Yard could do no more than arrest him for breaking parole, while he was already outside the City limits, and in danger of such arrest. Thinking to make a bold drive for liberty, and confident of the power and speed of Brimmer's car, he opened up to fifty miles an hour.

Looking back as he traversed the next straight mile, two things became painfully apparent. There was no longer any doubt about the object of the driver of the car behind, and there was no doubt about the speed of that car being equal to his own. The distance between them had not diminished. The Daimler could reach ninety miles an hour with ease, but the road was not straight enough to open her right up. Beauchamp hazarded sixty, but the next straight stretch revealed that the other car had accelerated to that. Beauchamp dashed through Chingford at sixty-five.

Beyond, on the other side of the River Lee, was Epping Forest, but the road was good, and the Daimler swayed along at seventy-five, then eighty. There were so many turns and twists at times that Beauchamp wondered how he managed to keep the car from capsizing. He could see nothing of the pursuing car, so he could only guess if it had drawn nearer or had fallen behind. He wished, above all things, that he could see who was in that other car.

Perhaps he would never see! Thoughts were drumming

through his brain as he raced madly along. Undoubtedly it was Scotland Yard on his trail, and Chingford was behind. That was the thought that troubled him most now. Perhaps the other car had stopped at Chingford, and its occupant had already telephoned to the villages ahead. How soon would he fall into a police trap, or be wrecked by a chain of spikes thrown across the road! Inspector Dalglish, he was sure, had suspected him at least of complicity in Anthony's murder. If it was Dalglish following him, he would take his flight as conclusive evidence, and risk everything to stop him. He wished he could find out if it was Dalglish.

He passed a fork, seeing too late to rectify his mistake that he had taken the wrong road. Not that that mattered much now, for Scotland Yard would see to it that he never reached Harwich. All he could hope for was to outwit the driver of the car behind, get back to town, and arrange for an alibi.

An accident of Fortune gave him an opportunity. Swerving into a straight stretch, he saw in front of him another Daimler Sedan, practically identical with the one he was driving. It also was eating up the road with absolute indifference to speed limits. It had taken the next turn ahead, which Beauchamp had almost reached, when he caught the first glimpse again of his own pursuer. Evidently the latter had stopped at the fork to ascertain which way he had gone, and now was following again unhampered by the terrific speed.

Beyond the turn was another straight piece of road, probably two miles in length. The other Daimler was still forging ahead. The sight of it, and of a finger-post at a

distance of a quarter of a mile, gave Beauchamp an inspiration. They were now on one of the main north roads, and the pursuer would think that in that direction was his destination. He would not be expected to turn at a place like that. He did not know where the side road would lead, but, if he could reach it, and slow down enough to turn before the pursuing car came in sight, he would be relieved of it temporarily at least. There was the possibility that the pursuer had not seen the other Daimler . . . would continue to follow it until it was overtaken, and the mistake discovered. It was just a chance.

As he swung round the corner on two wheels at forty-five, he breathed a sigh of relief. The other car was not yet in sight. But he could not restrain a desire to see who it was so intent upon overtaking him. Fortune again favoured the fulfilment of that desire. He brought the car to a standstill fifty yards along the side trail, where a turn almost screened him from view from the main road. Jumping out, he ran to a spot in the trees where the view was not so obstructed. He was in time to see the pursuing car go roaring by.

He saw something else . . . something that made his heart stand still, while icy perspiration oozed from every pore of his body.

The figure at the wheel of the car was the figure of a masked Chinaman!

For a moment he stood petrified, rooted to the spot; but the necessity for prompt action brought vitality again to his limbs. Kwong Heisu would soon discover his mistake . . . return to look for him. He promptly decided he would be safer if he hid somewhere in London, for Kwong Heisu,

evidently watching his movements from under cover in Chancery Lane, must be under the impression that he had brought the 'Light of Buddha' away with him.

Beauchamp swore, but he did not expend all his energy in breathing oaths. There was no room there for him to turn the car, but in two minutes he had backed it on the main road, and was retracing his steps towards Chingford with throttle wide open. Before he reached the fork, another thought inspired a fresh hope. Perhaps his ruse had deceived the Chinaman into believing he had followed the wrong car all the time. If so, there was still a chance to make Harwich, though a doubtful one.

He cursed the delay necessary to negotiate safely the hairpin bend of the fork, but breathed with relief as he hit the straight road again, and was able once more to open the throttle to its fullest extent!



THE SCORPION
CHAPTER IX
WHO KILLED BRIMMER?



CHAPTER IX

WHO KILLED BRIMMER?

MEANWHILE, Brimmer was awaiting Beauchamp's return with growing impatience. There was no way in which he could account for the delay. In common with other offices in the City, that of the Safety Deposit Company would close at five o'clock. Beauchamp would have had ample time to negotiate his business both with the bank and with them before that hour. Brimmer had informed his partner's valet that he was waiting for his master, to spend the night there, and presently the servant came to him to tell him that dinner was ready to be served, and to ask him if he would not partake of it in case Mr. Beauchamp should be delayed longer. Brimmer refused, and said he would wait. Another hour elapsing, he changed his mind. Torn with anxiety as to what had happened, he had very little appetite for food, but he decided he would eat, more for the purpose of passing the time. The meal finished, still with no sign of Beauchamp, he phoned Norton. The thing that puzzled him most was that Beauchamp had not communicated with him in any way to explain his non-arrival.

Norton had heard nothing, and was himself becoming

anxious and impatient. He asked Brimmer what he was going to do.

"Stay here until nine o'clock, and then, if he hasn't come, go home again," Brimmer told him.

"Something must have happened," Norton said nervously. "Kwong Heisu may have been watching. Perhaps he has trapped him."

The same possibility had occurred to Brimmer; either that, or Beauchamp had been detected tampering with the box Anthony had rented, described so accurately in the code message Kwong Heisu had returned to all of them, though he didn't know for certain that Beauchamp had been the recipient of a copy. After hanging up the telephone receiver, Brimmer walked into the hall, and examined the correspondence that was there. Sure enough, there was an envelope for Beauchamp, identical with his own.

9.30, and Brimmer was still in Brondesbury. It was the thought Norton had expressed in his remarks that had kept him there beyond the time he had stated. For that thought had raised other possibilities. In the first place, Kwong Heisu, or an accomplice of his, might have been in the vault at the same time as Beauchamp, intent upon working the same subterfuge. Or, Beauchamp might have succeeded in placing the diamond in the box he had rented for the purpose, and have been trapped by the Chinaman after leaving the vault. In that case . . . and here was the idea rather than any other that kept Brimmer in Brondesbury . . . Kwong Heisu, in disposing of Beauchamp, would know that he had not got the diamond; therefore, the safest place for him to stay for the night was in Beauchamp's home. Kwong Heisu

would not visit there, knowing that Beauchamp could not return.

At 9.45 Beauchamp's valet approached him to ascertain if there was anything he wanted. The man was apologize for his master, and visibly perturbed.

"Most unusual thing, sir, for Mr. Beauchamp to act like this," he said. "You don't think . . . pardon me for asking, sir . . . that anything can have happened to him? There's Mr. Anthony being murdered, and the papers suggesting that it was done by some mysterious Chinaman as an act of vengeance. You four gentlemen being associated before you came to England, sir . . ."

"You are right, Sedgwick. The Chinaman is as much our enemy as Mr. Anthony's."

"You don't say so, sir!"

"I do."

"Then it might have been any one of you, sir?"

"Quite possibly." Brimmer was wishing the man would stop asking questions. He didn't want Sedgwick to become sufficiently alarmed as to leave the house.

"I can quite understand, with the Chinaman still at large, you would want to come for mutual protection, sir," Sedgwick hazarded.

"Hardly as bad as that," Brimmer replied shortly. "We wanted to talk the matter over. Mr. Beauchamp was to have come here after he had transacted some business."

"It would be terrible if something had happened to him, sir, wouldn't it?"

"Nonsense, Sedgwick! Mr. Beauchamp is all right. His business may have detained him. I expect it has."

"I sincerely hope so, sir. By the way, sir," Sedgwick added, betraying still further his own nervousness, "there's a gun in the top left hand drawer of the *escritoire*. There's no telling what a Chinaman like that will do, sir. I thought you might feel more secure, sir, if you knew there was a gun."

Brimmer thanked him and dismissed him, counselling him not to worry. Nevertheless, he was glad of the man's suggestion: "You'll ring, sir, won't you, if you need anything?"

That indicated to Brimmer's satisfaction that the man had no intention of running away. Moreover, he was glad to know there was a gun, and immediately the servant left the room he crossed to the writing-desk, found the weapon, examined it to see with further satisfaction that it was loaded, and placed it in his pocket.

By the next time the library door opened, his nerves were so raw that it was back again in his hand. The door was opening stealthily, the person undoubtedly an intruder, for any of the servants would have knocked first. Though his hand was trembling, the gun was leveled to give him the advantage of the first shot.

A moment later he ejaculated: "Spink!"

"For God's sake, drop that gun, Mr. Brimmer! And don't make a sound!" Spink half whispered. He waited until the weapon was lowered before he entered, closing the door cautiously.

"I don't know how you got here, but I'm sure glad to see you," Brimmer told him, breathing with relief.

"I'm glad you haven't got much light in here," Spink said, advancing into the room. "The house is being watched, and not only by Scotland Yard."

For the past half hour, Brimmer had been giving the Crescent almost minutely inspections, and had left nothing but shaded lamps burning so that such movements might be unobserved from the outside.

"I couldn't come to the front door, so I had to make a burglarious entrance," Spink further explained. "There's an old saying, Mr. Brimmer, 'Set a thief to catch a thief!'. To be a successful sleuth, you've got to know a few criminals' tricks as well. Mr. Beauchamp hasn't got back yet?"

"I've been waiting for him since half past four this afternoon," Brimmer said disgustedly.

"Then you must have left your own house about the same time he did."

"A little before, to be exact."

"And, of course, you knew where he was going?"

"Naturally" Brimmer answered. Then he hesitated, remembering that Spink was unaware of their plans. But the visitor showed that he knew all about that by saying: "Then you were expecting him to come straight here after he had been to Chancery Lane for the diamond?"

Brimmer looked at him uneasily . . . searchingly, in the dim light. But the other stood his gaze without betraying any uneasiness himself. He said: "I should have appreciated it more if I had been taken more into your confidence. I might have made arrangements which would have been more successful."

"There wasn't time to tell you anything," Brimmer told

him. "Our plan was not conceived until after Inspector Dalglish had left us, while he told us that you were going to the Burlington Arcade to examine Anthony's flat for yourself."

"I left there in time to see Mr. Beauchamp leave the vault of the Safety Deposit Company . . in fact, some minutes before that. But I was watching for Kwong Heisu."

"You saw him?"

"Yes."

"Then Kwong Heisu was there?"

"Later events proved that the man I was watching was Kwong Heisu. I couldn't identify him at the time, so was waiting for him to make a move which would turn a mere probability into a certainty . . the same move Mr. Beauchamp made, renting a box to cover the removal of the diamond."

"Then, apparently, Beauchamp succeeded?" There was an undertone of relief in Brimmer's voice. Whatever had happened to Beauchamp subsequently, that diamond might still be safe. That relief was shortlived, for his visitor said: "He not only succeeded, but, had it not been for the later events I mentioned, he would have got away with the secret, and you might have waited here until next year for him to come."

"What do you mean?" Brimmer stammered. The next moment he added, heatedly: "Your words imply an accusation of double-crossing against my friend, and . . one of your employers!"

"When I undertake a job, I go into it with both eyes open," the other replied imperturbably. "If I see more

than I am expected to see, I can always quit. That's how I feel about the commission you have given me. I am trying to protect all three of you, not only severally, but jointly. Perhaps I should have said, severally and not only jointly. That is why I have come here to tell you what I saw happen."

"I have just enough patience left to listen to what you have to say, Mr. Spink . . if you are brief," Brimmer returned curtly.

"First, Mr. Brimmer," Spink let the curtness go unheeded, "I want you to tell me something. Who was it decided that Mr. Beauchamp should go with Inspector Dalgleish to examine Mr Anthony's effects?"

"Why, what has that got to do with it?"

"Merely that I should like to know."

"Well," Brimmer's manner was hesitating, as if the thought, coupled with the other's suggestion of double-crossing, was not pleasant in retrospect, "Mr. Beauchamp offered to go."

"I thought so. Just one more question, please. Whose plan was it that Williams, Mr Beauchamp's chauffeur, made up in some of your clothes, should leave your residence in your De Dion Bouton, to draw the remaining men from Scotland Yard away from there, and so give Mr. Beauchamp sufficient temporary freedom from espionage to allow him to get to Chancery Lane unobserved?"

"You are certainly well informed," Brimmer said, "but . . . I have already told you my patience is almost exhausted."

"You will save time if you answer my question, Mr. Brimmer. I want to get this thing right. From the beginning

of my contract with you gentlemen, it was understood that I was not expected to manufacture alibis or proofs of innocence for any of you. I have only to go to Scotland Yard with my information, and . . . ”

“We will assume that your conjecture is correct,” Brimmer said quickly. “In fact, I might as well admit that it was Mr. Beauchamp who planned the whole scheme, but not as you have presumed to think because you saw him emerge from the vault in Chancery Lane. Mr. Beauchamp went there, not to remove the diamond, but to transfer it to another box he rented himself. It was your own observation, if you remember, that such a thing might be safely and easily done.”

“I wonder what made him change his mind about transferring it,” the other ruminated, intent upon adhering to his first statement.

“Sir!” was all Brimmer could ejaculate. He was again bridling with rage.

“I know how you must feel about it, Mr. Brimmer.” Spink’s tone was more consoling than apologetic.

“Your story, please!” Brimmer was abrupt.

“Here it is. I had just got a line on the person I took to be Kwong Heisu when Mr. Beauchamp came out of the vault, and started in his car . . . your car, Mr. Brimmer . . . towards High Holborn. Kwong Heisu had evidently known he was in there, for he started immediately in pursuit. Mr. Beauchamp took what would be his usual route to get here, along the Tottenham Court Road. At Finsbury Park Corner, instead of turning to come here however, he kept straight along through Tottenham. Kwong Heisu was

fooled at first by that move, as he had lost sight of him in the traffic, and expected him to come here. He soon discovered that Beauchamp had dodged him, and took a short cut through the White Hart Lane. He picked Mr. Beauchamp up again just before he reached the old toll gate at the Four White Swans Inn at Waltham Cross. Mr. Beauchamp turned there, and drove towards Chingford, apparently with the intention of getting on to the old north road. I ask you, Mr. Brimmer, don't you see how he manœuvred the whole thing to get Scotland Yard off his trail, and give himself a chance to make a getaway? And, under the circumstances, if he did not intend to take the diamond away with him, why did he run the risk of going to Chancery Lane at all, once his path was clear for an exit?"

"Go on!" Brimmer said excitedly, though not convinced.

"Mr. Beauchamp must have recognized that he was being followed, and concluded of course that it must be either Kwong Heisu or Scotland Yard. He stepped on the gas. You know the power of your Daimler, Mr Brimmer. Kwong Heisu was driving a car equally powerful. About two miles inside Epping Forest, Mr. Beauchamp dodged him by swerving into a side road. He must have seen then who was following him, for he came back towards London at fully one hundred miles per hour. It is my opinion that he hadn't intended to come back, but thought he was safer in London from Kwong Heisu than he would be in the open country. I believe he was endeavouring to get clear of all of you. If I am wrong, answer me this, Mr. Brimmer. He would have been back in town by seven or seven-thirty

at the outside. Why didn't he communicate with you, and tell you if he was hiding, and afraid to come here?"

"I can't tell you," Brimmer stammered.

"Well, I'm going to find him, and learn what his object is. If he can't give me a satisfactory explanation, I'm through. I am not going to attempt to work with people who are not square with me or with each other. If you have any idea of where he would be likely to hide, it is up to you to tell me, Mr. Brimmer."

"I haven't the faintest idea," Brimmer replied. "I know of nowhere where he would go except here."

There was no doubt that he was speaking the truth. His manner was agitated, but it was with the agitation of fear. He added: "I don't understand it at all, Mr. Spink. It's a puzzle to me, unless Kwong Heisu has got him."

"Kwong Heisu was too far behind to pick him up again so quickly," Spink returned. "There was another Daimler in front of Beauchamp, exactly the same as yours. Kwong Heisu followed that car for another mile or two before he passed it, and saw that he had been fooled."

"There is still a chance that Kwong Heisu picked up his trail again," Brimmer faltered.

"I don't think so," the other replied. "In fact, I am positive he did not. I'll tell you why I think that. You saw the way I came in . . . like a burglar. That wasn't to avoid being seen by the plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard, but because Kwong Heisu has got men watching this house as well. Now I suppose you are satisfied that I am not chasing a March hare!"

Brimmer's staunch belief in his friend's loyalty returned

in spite of himself. He said: "I am satisfied that Mr. Beauchamp was only trying to escape from the observation of Scotland Yard. Further than that, he may have been trying to save his own life from Kwong Heisu, but I am still convinced that he was not running away with the diamond."

"If you are right, we may still trap Kwong Heisu through it," Spink's voice became eager. "You think he actually transferred the diamond?"

"I feel sure of it."

"Into another box that he rented?"

"Yes."

"Under his own name?"

"No. He intended using an assumed name. The safety vault people might have connected him with Anthony, and and have become suspicious."

"Well, I had better know what that name was."

"I can't tell you," Brimmer admitted. "It wasn't decided upon before we separated. There was no question of Beauchamp's loyalty to either Norton or myself."

The other man uttered a muffled exclamation of disgust and disappointment. Brimmer hardly noticed that. He started to add something to his statement, but was interrupted by the ringing of the front door bell. He turned with the startled question: "Who is that?"

"Nobody you need be afraid of, I guess. Kwong Heisu wouldn't come to the front door to be let in. I don't want to be seen, whoever it is. I'll wait on the other side of that door until you ascertain who the visitor is. While he is here, if it isn't Mr. Norton, I'll scout around outside to see

if I can get any further line on Kwong Heisu's men, and if I can discover a way of getting you out of this. Don't mention me at all."

Sedgwick announced: "Dr. Gleason, of Scotland Yard. I informed him that Mr. Beauchamp was out, sir. He said he would see you, Mr. Brimmer."

"Bring him in," Brimmer instructed him, wondering what the criminal pathologist could want. He looked round for Spink, but he had disappeared, leaving the door ajar, however.

"The servant told me Mr. Beauchamp was out," Dr. Gleason said as he entered. "Luckily, he told me you were here, Mr Brimmer. I called at your residence some time ago, and missed you."

"Then perhaps you had a message for both of us," Brimmer suggested

"More than a message, I hope," Dr. Gleason answered. "The fact is, I am rather concerned to learn that both you two gentlemen, together with Mr. Norton, of Ealing, may possibly be troubled by the same person who murdered Richard Anthony. I don't think you have anything to fear, myself, for all three houses are carefully watched by Scotland Yard. At the same time, I advise you take precautions."

"It was good of you to come to tell us that," Brimmer said, concealing the irony he felt at the suggestion. To take precautions was the last thing he needed to be advised to do.

"Oh, well, I have a deeper purpose than that," Dr. Gleason replied genially. "I'll get straight to the point,

so as not to detain you longer than is necessary. I understand that you are staying here for the night, so you can pass on what I say to Mr. Beauchamp when he comes in."

It was on the point of Brimmer's tongue to tell him he did not know where Beauchamp was, and that there was very little likelihood of his returning that night. He restrained the prompting. To say anything would of necessity reveal that Beauchamp had tried to escape from the vigilance of Scotland Yard, and not only would the information place Beauchamp in danger of arrest immediately he was found, but it might lead to a compulsory revelation about the 'Light of Buddha'. He permitted the pathologist to proceed.

"I have been busy in my laboratory at Scotland Yard, and have isolated the poison that was the immediate cause of Mr. Anthony's death."

Brimmer looked at him in surprise, observing: "I thought, from what Inspector Dalgleish said, that the scorpion killed him."

"The scorpion would never have killed him by itself," the pathologist explained. "The scorpion's claws were smeared with the juice of the *toxicanthretus* fungus, the most deadly of all the fungi."

"Heavens!" Brimmer exclaimed. "Is there no length to which that fiend of a Chinaman won't go?"

"He could have used a knife, certainly," Dr. Gleason answered quietly, "but that would have destroyed the scenic effect he wished to establish. The murderer apparently believed that you would better understand the significance of the scorpion."

He paused to observe the effect of his words, then continued: "To come to the purpose of my visit. Not only have I, as I said, segregated the poison, but I have also been successful in preparing an antitoxin, which requires, however, instant use before the other can have taken full effect. I have two little tubes of it here."

He produced two minute pieces of glass tubing, sealed at both ends, but drawn at one end to the fineness of a needle point.

"Keep one of these where you can carry it on your person without breaking it," he said. "If you are attacked by the Chinaman, either with or without a scorpion, try to retain enough presence of mind to jab it into yourself, where the poison enters for preference, and break it off. The effect of the antitoxin will not be speedy enough to excite suspicion. In fact, to all appearances the poison will have worked. Kwong Heisu will think that you are dead, but, thanks to his disapproval of the certainty of a knife, you will come to life again."

Brimmer grasped his hand and wrung it warmly. "I can't thank you enough for taking this trouble, Dr. Gleason," he said. "The knowledge that I may now be able to defeat him takes away a great deal of the menace of Kwong Heisu."

"I think you will soon realize that Scotland Yard is taking a greater interest in your safety than you were prone to imagine," Dr. Gleason replied. "I'll bid you good-night, Mr. Brimmer. As you will be seeing Mr. Beauchamp, I'll leave this second tube on the desk here for him. You can easily explain its purpose."

Brimmer accompanied him to the door. They stood for a moment or two conversing in the front hall, and then he let the doctor out. Hearing the door close, Sedgwick, the valet, appeared on the scene. Brimmer said to him, thinking of what Spink had suggested he would do, "I may be leaving later, Sedgwick. If I do, it will not be in the ordinary way, as I must get out without being observed. If I do, I'll ring the library bell twice, and leave a note on the desk saying which way I went out. You can then see that the door or the window is fastened behind me."

"Will the other gentleman be going with you?" Sedgwick asked.

"The other gentleman?" Brimmer questioned, surprised at his knowledge of Spink's visit.

"The one you were talking to in the library, sir," Sedgwick answered. "You must have let him in yourself, sir. I think I heard you mention his name . . . Spink, wasn't it, sir?"

Brimmer smothered an exclamation of annoyance; then decided that it didn't matter after all if the servant did know. "I was coming to you in the library, sir, when I heard you talking," Sedgwick further explained. "That is why I didn't come in. I hope I haven't committed any indiscretion, sir."

"Certainly not," Brimmer assured him with more composure. "I was talking to Mr. Spink. He is the private detective we have engaged to assist us in finding the murderer of Mr. Anthony. Mr. Spink may be coming back, but I'll let him in, so you needn't bother, Sedgwick. And it isn't necessary for you to stay up."

"Very good, sir."

Sedgwick turned to leave him; then paused. "Pardon me for asking, sir," he said, "but, if you go, will you be leaving Mr. Beauchamp's revolver, sir?"

"Why, yes," Brimmer answered. "Here, take it now!"

Brimmer went back to the library. For five minutes perhaps he sat contemplating the little pointed tubes Dr. Gleason had left behind. Then he began to wonder about Spink's non-reappearance. What was keeping him? Had he fallen into the clutches of Kwong Heisu's men, who he said were watching outside? Such thoughts made him feel decidedly nervous, and he regretted having yielded up Beauchamp's revolver so readily. He might still need to use it himself if Spink did not return. There was some satisfaction, however, in the possession of the little tubes of antitoxin . . if he had time to use one of them.

Other thoughts about Spink occurred to him, thoughts which had not occurred to him before. They concerned Spink's very definite knowledge of the movements of both Beauchamp and Kwong Heisu . . his very plausible explanation for Beauchamp's non-return. How did Spink know so much about it? He had not said he was there . . following in another car. Then where did he get the information? That was a disturbing mystery in itself. He would question Spink immediately he came back.

The door through which his first visitor had disappeared was still partly open. He went to close it, imagining he would feel more secure. But first he took a step or

two in the darkened corridor outside, thinking for a moment to discover which way Spink had gone.

Two steps were all he took. He had barely time to become aware of the strange shape that closed in behind him, for a hand holding a pad was clamped over his mouth with the speed of an avalanche. At the same time he experienced the sensation of pointed tweezers at his jugular vein, and, with a quick movement, he was thrust again into the dim light of the library, his powerful assailant still holding his mouth to prevent him from shouting.

There was no need to look at him to know who his assailant was, though in his impotent struggle he glimpsed a hideous Chinese mask. Neither was there need of assurance as to the nature of the horrible creature clinging tenaciously at his throat! With a swift movement he swept his hand there to knock it off, but with a movement that was equally swift a hand with a skin like rubber closed over his and held it there until the venom of the scorpion had been injected!

For one minute . . . perhaps a trifle longer . . . Brimmer struggled frantically to get to the desk on which were the tiny glass tubes of salvation, while the poison of the fungus ran its rapid, excruciating course through the arteries of his body.

He never reached the desk, even when his assailant released him. The deadly toxin had already done its work, and he fell, an inert mass, upon the thick pile of the library carpet!

Some minutes later the murderer, having evidently overheard Dr. Gleason's remarks about the antitoxin, smiled as he picked up one of the little tubes from the desk. Knowing his victim to be then past aid, he pricked it into Brimmer's throat, close to the hand holding the scorpion, and broke it off.



THE SCORPION
CHAPTER X
BEAUCHAMP'S UNCONSCIOUS ALIBI



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AN hour later the front door bell rang. Sedgwick had not undressed. He was waiting to see if Brimmer left in the way he had suggested. Evidently he had not, as there had been no sound from the library bell. Now Sedgwick waited for a minute to see if Brimmer would let the visitor in, as he had said he would, supposing it to be the private detective returning, much later than he had expected him to. As the bell rang again, he went to answer it. The man outside, who looked like a plain-clothes policeman, enquired for Mr. Beauchamp, however, so Sedgwick, unwilling to admit anybody without first ascertaining who he was, enquired his name. To his profound amazement the other answered: "Name's Spink. Private detective engaged by Mr. Beauchamp and his friends."

"Mr. Beauchamp isn't home, sir," Sedgwick replied. Apparently he was not supposed to know of Spink's previous visit, yet he was vaguely suspicious concerning his professed ignorance of Mr. Beauchamp's absence . . . if it was Spink!

"Then I'll see Mr. Brimmer. I know he is here."

"Oh," said Sedgwick. "You do know that!" He thought

he would still test him, so he asked: "Is Mr. Brimmer expecting you?"

"No," Spink answered. "I didn't telephone, but I enquired for him at his own house, and Williams, Mr. Beauchamp's chauffeur, told me that he was here . . I thought with Mr. Beauchamp."

"What's the game you're trying to pull off?" Sedgwick was becoming nervously annoyed.

"What do you mean . . game?" Spink demanded.

"I suppose you weren't here a little more than an hour ago?" Sedgwick tried to be sarcastic.

"An hour ago?" Certainly not!" Spink was showing bewilderment. "Who said I was here?"

"An hour ago there was a man here. I heard Mr. Brimmer call him by name . . Spink. Mr. Brimmer verified that when I mentioned that I had heard him talking with you in the library."

"Then you didn't let him in?"

"I did not. I don't know how he got in, but that's no business of yours. You had better get a move on."

"It is my business," Spink was becoming exasperated by the man's persistence. "I tell you my name is Spink, and . . ."

"So was the other man's who was here before," Sedgwick started to close the door. "Moreover, Mr. Brimmer knew him."

"Listen here," Spink returned, holding the door against the servant. "The man who was here before wasn't me, I'll admit. But I am the only Spink engaged in this work and I don't know that there's another Spink in the whole

of London. An hour ago I was talking with Mr. Norton in Ealing. I went from there to Mr. Brimmer's, and from there here. If someone has impersonated me well enough to deceive Mr. Brimmer, there's something wrong, and I am going to find out what it is."

By the time he finished speaking he was inside the door, having overcome the feeble resistance of the servant. The man was decidedly nervous. He faltered, bewildered: "But, sir, how am I to know . . . ?"

"That part of it doesn't concern me," Spink said tersely. "Here," he added, however, "is a police whistle. If you don't like taking me on trust, there are two detectives watching this house . . . men from Scotland Yard. You can blow the whistle any time you like, but I am going to see Mr. Brimmer without delay."

With the whistle in his hand, Sedgwick was more reassured. But he said: "He may not be here, sir, now."

"How is that? Didn't I understand that he was staying all night?"

"That was the first arrangement, sir, until Mr. Beauchamp failed to show up. Then this other Spink . . . or the man who said that was his name . . . said he would try to find a way out of the house for him, so that the men watching wouldn't see. Mr. Brimmer told me that. He was to ring to let me know. He hasn't done so, but . . ."

"Take me to where Mr. Brimmer was!" Spink commanded him.

Holding the whistle in one hand, with his master's gun in the other, Sedgwick led the way to the library. He knocked on the door, but there was no answer.

"Open it!" Spink said.

Sedgwick did so. The sight that met their gaze made him shrink back in terror. Brimmer was lying on the carpet in the centre of the floor, while the contents of the safe in the corner, and of the writing desk were scattered in all directions.

"Keep your nerve, man!" Spink commanded sharply. "Go to the window over there and blow that whistle!"

Sedgwick complied. Glancing backwards, he observed that this new Spink was already bending over the dead man. His suspicions were not entirely gone. The window was on the second story of the house. He not only opened it, but let himself hastily through as he blew the whistle, preferring to take the chance of a ten-foot drop into the shrubbery below.

At the sound of the whistle, Hollis, one of the Scotland Yard men who was watching near, ran over to him before he had had time to recover his feet.

"What's the idea?" he asked.

"Murder!" Sedgwick gasped. "Mr. Brimmer!"

Gibbs, the other plain-clothes man, came running from the rear of the house as Spink thrust his head through the window. Spink had just missed Sedgwick. "Bring him in with you, Gibbs," he said. "I'll let you in."

"What's the idea of jumping through the window?" Hollis asked Sedgwick, as they moved towards the front door.

"I was scared of him," Sedgwick answered.

"Scared of whom? The man you say was murdered?"

"No; the other fellow."

"What other fellow?"

"The one at the window just now."

"Spink?"

"That's what he said his name was."

"Not only was . . but is."

"You know him then?"

"Apparently you don't. Is that it?"

"I never saw him before," Sedgwick answered. "And I didn't see the other man who was with Mr. Brimmer before he was murdered."

"What's this you say?" Gibbs demanded. "There was still another man?"

"Yes, the man who must have killed Mr. Brimmer. I heard them talking in the library . . the room where Mr. Brimmer is. Mr. Brimmer told me . . after he thought he had left . . that he was Mr. Spink."

"I can't make anything of this fellow," Hollis said to Gibbs.

"Let's get this straight," Gibbs turned to Sedgwick. "Tell us exactly what happened, so far as you know."

"Mr. Brimmer was waiting here for Mr. Beauchamp," Sedgwick replied. "I heard him talking to someone in the library . . someone he called Spink. Then Dr. Gleason came; said he was from Scotland Yard. Apparently the other man had gone before that, but Mr. Brimmer said he was coming back, to try to get him out unobserved, because there were men watching the house. I didn't know he had come back."

"Then you didn't let him in?"

"No, nor the first time he came. I don't know how he got in, but it must have been through a window. Then the Mr. Spink who is inside now came, and said he wasn't here before, and . . . "

"Neither was I," Spink had opened the door to hear the last of what the servant said. "Come and see what I found when I did come!"

They followed Spink to the library, and took in the condition of the room at a glance. They questioned Spink as to his own ideas concerning how it happened.

"Search me," Spink answered. "This is just how I found things. It was lucky you fellows were handy, or this man might have got away."

"I wasn't trying to get away," Sedgwick expostulated. "I was afraid of you. I didn't believe you were who you said you were, and . . . "

"Invented that cock-and-bull story about someone else named Spink being here before," Spink interrupted him.

"That's what he's been trying to feed us on," Gibbs said.

Sedgwick became more terrified. He stammered: "But there was someone else, and Mr. Brimmer . . . "

"You are sure it wasn't the masked Chinaman?" Hollis questioned sarcastically. "Who else is in the house?"

"No one. There's a woman comes daily to do the cleaning."

"Same ideas again, eh?" Gibbs commented. "Strange notions shared by Anthony and Beauchamp. By the way," he turned to Sedgwick, "where is Mr. Beauchamp?"

"I couldn't tell you, sir. He hasn't been here since this morning, sir."

"What are you trying to give us now?" Gibbs asked vehemently. "We followed him here this afternoon."

"No we didn't," Hollis said quickly, pointing to the dead man. "That's the man we followed here."

"But it's Beauchamp's car standing outside. I checked the number."

"If they're slippery enough to start shuffling one another . . ." Hollis began, but did not stop to complete his sentence. Instead he walked to the telephone and called Scotland Yard.

"Hollis speaking," he said. "I want Inspector Dalglish."

"This is Inspector Dalglish," came the reply. "What is it, Hollis?"

"Can you come right over to Beauchamp's place in Brondesbury, Inspector?" Hollis said. "Here's another one of that gang been murdered!"

"And another scorpion," Gibbs prompted him, observing the creature trying to escape from beneath the dead man's hand.

"And another scorpion," Hollis repeated into the telephone.

"Which one this time?" Dalglish asked. "Beauchamp?"

"No, Brimmer. Beauchamp isn't here."

"I'll be right there," the inspector said, ringing off.

"What's your name?" Hollis turned again to Sedgwick.

"Sedgwick, sir."

"Frisk him, Gibbs, and see that he hasn't got the means of committing suicide like the other fellow did . . . to screen his damned Chinaman!"

Sedgwick submitted to being searched without offering resistance. In a moment Gibbs had found the revolver, which Sedgwick had put back into his pocket before tumbling through the window.

"So! Packing a gun, eh?" Gibbs observed.

Sedgwick started to explain, but Hollis wouldn't let him finish.

"Shut up!" he exploded. "Don't explain anything, unless you come out with the truth. But you'd better save all your explanations until the inspector gets here.

"If it was the Chinaman, there must be something supernatural about him," Gibbs suggested.

"Meaning?" Spink asked.

"We've been watching this house since the early afternoon, so I don't see how he got in. We saw you come in, but we knew you were in on the job."

"He may have got in while one of us was getting a bite of supper," Hollis said. "Or he might have been let in before we got here," he continued, with a meaning glance directed towards Sedgwick. "Besides, we weren't here exactly to check up on who came in, but to prevent Beauchamp, as we thought, from making a getaway."

"Then he may be still in the house," Spink suggested, referring again to the Chinaman.

"How?" Hollis asked.

"You didn't see him go," Spink said.

"He has had plenty of opportunity to get out since Sedgwick attracted our attention to that window," Gibbs observed.

"I gave Sedgwick the whistle to do that," Spink replied.

"I only jumped out of the window because I was afraid you might not be the real Mr. Spink," Sedgwick made another attempt at explanation.

Hollis tried to wither him with a glance, but Gibbs remarked in an undertone to Hollis and Spink: "He doesn't look the kind of a gink who would have the nerve to blow a police whistle as he was trying to make a getaway, does he?"

"Not after staying in the house an hour with the dead man," Spink answered. "I should say that's about how long Brimmer has been dead."

"Then it must have happened immediately after Dr. Gleason left," Hollis said.

"Dr. Gleason?" Spink was surprised, and showed it.

"Yes. He was here. I spoke to him as he came in. He said he was going to leave Beauchamp something to counteract the scorpion poison."

"Wonder what it was," Spink replied.

"Perhaps this little tube," Gibbs said. He had discovered the little tube on the writing desk. "If it was, he didn't get a chance to use it."

Hollis walked to the dead man.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "He must have left two of them. Here is another one broken in Brimmer's left hand. The other piece of it is sticking in his throat. Couldn't have been of much use."

"What's all this?" Inspector Dalglish asked, entering at that moment. Spink had fastened back the spring of the Yale lock on the front door. "And who is this?" The inspector's gaze was resting on the discomfited figure of Sedg-

wick. "What does he know about it?" he added the third question, as Hollis supplied the valet's name.

Hollis quickly gave an account of the valet's actions. "There's the gun he was packing," he finished.

Dalglish took it from him and broke it. "Fully loaded," he observed. "Say, fellow," he turned to Sedgwick, "since when have you been in the habit of carrying a loaded gun on your person?"

"I tried to explain to these gentlemen, but they wouldn't listen to me," Sedgwick faltered. "It isn't my gun, sir. It belongs to Mr. Beauchamp."

"And you guard the house with it while he is away, I suppose?"

"No, sir. I never had it before. Mr. Brimmer had it first. Then, when he thought he wouldn't stay the night after all, I asked him to leave it with me."

"What for?"

"He had been speaking about the masked Chinaman," Sedgwick answered. "He was afraid all the evening that the Chinaman would get him here, so I told him where it was. Then, thinking of how Tomkins, Mr. Anthony's valet, sir, was murdered, I thought I should feel safer in . . ."

"Tomkins committed suicide," Dalglish interrupted him, showing annoyance at this repetition of the murder theory in the presence of Spink.

"I didn't know that, sir," Sedgwick half apologized. "Mr. Brimmer thought he was murdered, sir."

"Who else was in the house besides Mr. Brimmer and you?"

"No one, sir; except the man who murdered him. There are no other servants living here. There's only a woman comes in to do the cleaning."

"Then where was Mr. Beauchamp?"

"I don't know, sir. Mr. Brimmer was waiting for him, but I think he was getting tired of it."

"It looks as if he didn't get away quickly enough," the inspector commented. "When did you get here, Spink?"

"About three minutes in front of Hollis and Gibbs," Spink told him.

"And Brimmer was dead then?"

"He had been dead, I should imagine, about an hour. Funny thing is, Inspector, this fellow didn't want to let me in."

"He didn't, eh?"

"No. It seems he heard someone talking to Brimmer in this room. Had an idea that Brimmer called him Spink. When I told him who I was, and that I hadn't been here before, he professed to doubt what I said. He'll tell you that's why he jumped out of the window."

"And you came in, and discovered this?"

"Yes."

"You said you were not here before?"

"Sure thing I did. This is the first time I have been in the house. I was paying them all a visit, or trying to. About two hours ago I was talking to Norton in Ealing. Then I went along to Brimmer's, and, hearing he wasn't at home, I came along here. His servant said he was here . . . or, his chauffeur, rather. I suppose it's all the same thing.

I thought, if anyone was missing, it was Brimmer . . . not Beauchamp."

"You didn't go into Brimmer's?"

"No."

"Then I can tell you something you probably don't know," Dalgleish said. "Directly after you phoned, Hollis, and before I had got hold of Dr. Gleason, I received a call from Hammersmith. Brimmer's place has been overhauled the same as this!"

"When . . . before or after?"

"They couldn't give me any details, as they had only just discovered the fact. But they told me this. Williams, Beauchamp's chauffeur, was wondering when he would receive instructions to come home. Beauchamp had left him there while he went to attend to some business in Brimmer's car. Brimmer apparently came here in Beauchamp's car. I sent Brooks down there to investigate, and came on here myself. It seems there was nobody killed out there."

"It looks as if they were ringing the changes for some purpose," Gibbs observed.

"It has that appearance," Dalgleish agreed. "We'll have to find out what that purpose was. Williams was getting anxious as neither Brimmer nor Beauchamp went back there. Hardy and Calhoun . . . it was Hardy who called me, after Brimmer's chauffeur had made frantic efforts to find a policeman, and so attracted his attention . . . they say they saw no one go in or come out. If it hadn't been that I had received your call, Hollis, I should have said that was an inside job. Now it looks as if the same hand pulled off both jobs, doesn't it?"

"This also has all the earmarks of an inside job," Hollis said, with another scathing glance directed in the direction of the unfortunate Sedgwick.

"If not, that damned Chinaman must be able to come and go without anyone seeing him," Gibbs added.

"We won't re-open that side of the discussion right now," Dalgleish said quickly. "There was no Chinaman in Anthony's when Tomkins . . . suicided."

"If it was someone Brimmer took for me, it couldn't have been a Chinaman," Spink said testily.

"Well," Dalgleish replied, "haven't I told you all along that I didn't think it was a Chinaman? Here's something that looks queer to me. Where is Beauchamp all this time? He didn't stay at Brimmer's, and he didn't come here. Where did he go?"

"There's only one person who might be able to tell you, and he said nothing to me," Spink suggested. "That's Norton."

"There may be something in that," Dalgleish returned. "I'll give him a ring."

He went to the telephone, and asked for Norton's number. When he got the connection, and was speaking to Norton, he said: "This is Inspector Dalgleish speaking . . . from Beauchamp's. Beauchamp isn't here; hasn't been all day. Brimmer is, but he's dead. Say," he continued, heedless of the gasps at the other end of the wire, "you fellows have been trying to pull off some double-crossing. I want to know who made all the plans. Come on! Out with it . . . straight!"

"It was Beauchamp's idea," Norton stammered. "You say Brimmer is dead?"

"Yes; you heard me. Now . . . where's Beauchamp?"

"I don't know . . . honest I don't!" Norton answered. "I tell you, I've been getting anxious. He left Hammersmith about the same time I did, and . . ."

"Yes, I know all about that. What I want to know is, where was he going?"

"He said he had some private business . . ."

"It seems you've all got a lot of private business," the inspector interrupted him. "You had better make up your mind to come across with it. Stay where you are until I get you again!"

He slammed the receiver, and turned to the others. "I thought so," he said. "I've been suspicious of that bird . . . that he had some purpose of his own. I don't mean Norton; I mean Beauchamp. It was Beauchamp who fixed it for Brimmer to come here, Beauchamp who arranged the switching of identities that fooled us. Moreover, Beauchamp is the man most likely to know how to get into his own house unobserved. Probably he knows Brimmer's house just as well."

"He did it unobserved all right," Hollis said ruefully. "The only man we saw come in here besides Spink was Dr. Gleason."

"Yes; he told me when I was speaking to him just now that it wasn't long since he left here. Here he is. He can speak for himself," he finished, as he heard the front door close. "We haven't touched the body, Dr. Gleason," he went on, as the pathologist entered, "but it's the same

as the other case. You can see a bit of a scorpion sticking out between his fingers."

"Poor devil!" Dr. Gleason said. "Evidently he didn't have a chance to use my antitoxin."

"There's a piece of a glass tube sticking in his throat, if that is what you gave him," Hollis told him.

Dr. Gleason walked to the body quickly. "That's it," he exclaimed, as he looked down, "but . . he didn't put that into his throat himself, I'll swear. I should say that it was put there after he was dead . . by his murderer. That means . . ."

"What?"

"The person who killed him with the scorpion must have been in the house at the same time I was, listening to the instructions I gave him. I left a tube for him to give to Beauchamp as well. Yes; there it is, still on the writing desk where I put it. This was the man who led me in," he turned on Sedgwick. "Where were you while I was talking to Mr. Brimmer?"

"God! Don't say it was me, sir!" Sedgwick trembled almost to falling on his knees. "I didn't hear a word you said to him, sir. I was in my own room. I've been telling these gentlemen there was another man with him, and . . ."

"That man, whoever he was, went to great lengths to impersonate me, according to Sedgwick's story," Spink said grimly. "Personally, I don't see how Brimmer could have been deceived in that way."

"He might have been," Dagleish surprised him by remarking. "He only saw you for the first time this afternoon, while anyone with a little experience at disguise could

impersonate you, or any one of us. And this is the feature of it that appeals to my imagination, Spink. Whoever was here . . . and did this . . . if any reliance can be placed on this fellow's story at all . . . knew that you were connected with the investigations into Anthony's death. He might have had one of two reasons at least for impersonating you. Either he figured that Brimmer would admit you without question, or for some reason or other he wanted to get you intrigued. Possibly it was the first, for he would figure that Scotland Yard would accept your word without your being put to the necessity of substantiating an alibi. Scotland Yard knows you too well for that. Now, who is there besides ourselves, who knows that these people had commissioned you to start private investigations?"

"No one but my partner, Conway," Spink answered.

"Then that limits it at present to Norton and Beauchamp," the inspector said. "You say you were with Norton. Well, Beauchamp isn't unlike you, and . . ."

"The only weakness in that argument is that Beauchamp wouldn't need to throw his own effects around like this," Spink replied.

"Perhaps not; but, wishing to make it look as if someone else had committed the crime, he more or less had to do it as a blind. I don't suppose there is anything lying around that is of any consequence, or will help at all in putting us on the right track, is there?"

What might have been said in answer to that was prevented by the ringing of the telephone bell. Dalglish stepped over to it, picked up the receiver, and said brusquely: "Hullo!"

"What's that?" he demanded, after listening for a moment. The others could see that he was hearing something which made it difficult for him to control his excitement. "You're sure of that? . . . You haven't touched anything else? . . . That's good! . . . Yes, I suppose you wonder. This is Inspector Dalglish of Scotland Yard speaking. Let me speak to the constable who brought him in, will you? No; fetch him back. I'll ring you again in two minutes."

He turned from the receiver exultantly. "What was I telling you?" he demanded of them all. Then, without waiting for an answer, he continued: "That was the Chelmsford County Hospital. Beauchamp has just been carried in there. Had a bad spill about six miles out of Chelmsford. Believe me, he's a queer bird. If he didn't know something about this, why was he trying to beat it out of the country?"

"Sure looks funny," Hollis said. "You don't think it was a phony call, do you, Inspector?"

"We'll soon know if it is," Dalglish said. "That's why I hung up to call back. I'll do that now."

He asked Central for the Chelmsford Hospital. "Scotland Yard speaking from 25 Crescent Mansions, Brondesbury," he said. "You were ringing me just now."

"That's right, Inspector. Here's the constable to speak to you."

"You wanted to speak to me, Inspector," came through a moment later. "I'm Constable Rooke, of the Essex County Constabulary."

"Yes," Dalglish said. "About that man Beauchamp you took to the hospital. How long is it since you found him?"

"Must be nearly two hours, Inspector. I was patrolling a country beat when I came across the wrecked car. I had to wait over an hour before a car came along to pick him up."

"All right!" Dalgleish said savagely. "Stay right with him, and hold everything he has on him until I get there. Don't let anything be touched!"

"That settles that," he said to the others. "It 'wasn't Beauchamp who did this, after all."

"You're sure?"

"Couldn't have been. At the time this murder was committed he was lying unconscious in a ditch on the road to Chelmsford. But I'm going out there as soon as I'm through here, and I'm going to find out why he broke his parole. Brooks should have given me a ring before this. I'll find out what's delaying him."

"Have you got the photographs of the finger-prints on Anthony's safe with you?" Spink asked him as he was returning to the telephone.

"Yes, here they are. Have you found some more?"

"Not yet. We haven't touched anything. There may be some on the knob of that safe combination."

In his conversation with Detective-Sergeant Brooks, Dalgleish learned only two facts of importance. Brimmer's study had been ransacked, apparently without any effort to murder anybody, and there were finger-prints scattered around which tallied exactly with those left by Anthony's murderer!

"All right, Brooks," the inspector said finally. "They've picked Beauchamp up on the Chelmsford Road. He's in

the hospital out there, and I'm going straight out. Stay where you are until you hear further from me."

"Well?" he turned to Spink. "Any success?"

"Yes," Spink said. "This bird is either a damned fool, or is perfectly satisfied with his own security. Finger-prints everywhere, and . . ."

"Any of them tally?"

"All of them."

"Brooks found the same at Brimmer's place," Dalgleish said. "It doesn't look quite so much like an inside job now, but there's no need to carry those photographs around any longer. Those finger-prints are recognizable a mile away."

"You're right," Dr. Gleason remarked quietly. "And if you want to catch the murderer of Anthony and Brimmer you'll have to discover him with his gloves on."

"What's that?" the inspector demanded.

"I've been wondering how that fellow managed to handle the scorpions with immunity," Dr. Gleason answered, "and I've just found out why. Here, on Brimmer's face, are the same impressions as were on the face of Tomkins, Anthony's valet. This time, however, they take in the finger-tips, and there is no trace of finger nails."

"But . . . gloves?" Dalgleish expostulated.

"Evidently made for the purpose of leaving deceptive impressions," the doctor went on in the same quiet tones. "Yes, you may just as well dispense with those photographs."



THE SCORPION

CHAPTER XI

DALGLEISH MAKES A LOST JOURNEY



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“**W**HAT are you going to do, Spink?” Inspector Dalgleish asked the question ten minutes later, after they had searched for more illuminating clues without result, and were in a room by themselves. Dr. Gleason had called in the ambulance, and had had the body removed, he taking care of the scorpion.

Spink answered him vaguely, for he had not quite decided what to do. He had assisted in the search for clues with his customary precision, though he expected to find nothing. Outwardly looking for clues, inwardly he had been struggling for a solution to this unexpected impersonation of himself. He was satisfied that the murderer could not have been Kwong Heisu in person, but perhaps the Chinaman had hired some thug to visit Beauchamp while he attended to Brimmer, who was probably more likely to have what he wanted. And Dr. Gleason's suggestion about the gloves gave rise to several trains of thought. The finger-like impressions made by them here were scattered about too promiscuously for mere carelessness. They were intended to convey the idea that it was Kwong Heisu who had committed the crime. Besides, the gloves could easily

be duplicated, and Dr. Gleason's remarks about the necessity of wearing gloves as protection against the scorpions certainly carried conviction.

But then, whom would Kwong Heisu trust with the delicate secret of the 'Light of Buddha'? The flaw in that he speedily had brushed aside, as he remembered the code message filched from Anthony's safe, a copy of which had been sent to each of the other three. Kwong Heisu was doubtless expecting to find nothing more than the key to the cipher, and any thug could be sent to search for that, without being told its importance to the Chinaman.

To Spink, it was beginning to look more like an inside job than he had first thought possible. Kwong Heisu might have had both Tomkins and Sedgwick working for him . . . someone else at Brimmer's . . . perhaps Norton's. Spink had decided that it was a lead worth following. He was wishing for an opportunity to grill Sedgwick again, without such grilling being overheard.

However, he answered Dagleish in a manner which was non-committal.

"I haven't decided," he said. "Until you got that phone call from the hospital, I hardly knew what to think. I felt as if I was in a kind of a blind alley. You almost had me believing, Inspector, that I would be better out of the affair."

Indeed, the fact that Kwong Heisu had evidently had him watched so closely already was enough to prompt the sinking of his own identity in his further endeavours. It was rather disconcerting to think that the Chinaman was interested in him so soon.

"You nearly had me believing that I was being used by them as a cat's-paw . . . a screen to cover up what they were doing among themselves," he went on. "Now it's different again, with that news you have received about Beauchamp. It wasn't Beauchamp who did this as a blind, and it couldn't have been Beauchamp who ransacked Brimmer's place. And it wasn't Norton. I was with him in Ealing at the time both jobs were pulled off. Neither could it have been Kwong Heisu, for, say what you like about my being impersonated by the murderer, I flatter myself that no Chinaman could have palmed himself off as me. But the question is, who was it?"

"I feel more or less up a tree myself," Dalgleish admitted. "From the way Beauchamp has been acting, I was all set to tap him on the shoulder, and accuse him of both murders. It would have given some sort of motive, too, for Tomkins's suicide. Now that's all shot to hell, and I would as soon believe it was your Chinaman as anyone else. The pendulum swings back to him anyway. But here is what puzzles me, Behind all this there is something more than revenge. That supplies quite a good motive, but it doesn't explain the systematic search into their private papers. Whoever did it, there's something he expects to find . . . something he believes one of them has got. Have you got any idea what it is?"

Spink was conscious of the fact that Dalgleish was subjecting him to a keen scrutiny, as if wondering if he really had any inside information. Spink did not bat an eye as he suggested: "Perhaps he imagines there is still a chance

to recover some of the missing jewels, which he thinks they have not disposed of."

"And have they some of them?" Dalglish asked sharply.

Spink's answer was still vague. "There's no reason why Kwong Heisu should know they had disposed of them all," he said, "or he may be after the proceeds, knowing them to be immensely wealthy. Apparently all the loose change was stolen from Anthony's safe. Doubtless it is the same here."

Then he asked: "Is there anything in particular that you would like me to do?"

"That is why I mentioned that the pendulum is swinging back again to the Chinaman," Dalglish answered. "It was the Chinaman they wanted you to get, wasn't it?"

"They are terrified to death of him," Spink answered. "I think you will find that Beauchamp was trying to show him a clean pair of heels."

"Very likely," the inspector agreed. "As the case now stands, we have all of us got to look for someone outside of their number."

"Oh, well; I guess I'll still be looking for Kwong Heisu," Spink said. "That suits you?"

"I was going to suggest it, but I didn't exactly want to run you up against him. If he hangs out in Limehouse, he is the queerest bird that district has ever produced."

"He certainly has me at a disadvantage," Spink grumbled. "It didn't take him long to learn that I was interested. I have never so much as seen him, while he knows sufficient about me . . . voice and all . . . to be able to impersonate me before the people with most cause to fear him."

"That is of course assuming that what Sedgwick said was correct," Dalgleish replied. "We have only his word that someone was talking to Brimmer . . . someone who was supposed to be you. What if he had a different motive for not wanting to let you in; cognizance of the murder, in fact? There is something decidedly peculiar in the way these servants are acting. Tomkins committed suicide because he figured I was on his trail. Conclusion, he either knew something about the crime, or was himself implicated. And what does Sedgwick do at the first opportunity after you get here? Granted he blew the whistle which would summon Hollis and Gibbs. That may have been merely to distract your attention. Then he jumps through the window quietly, so as not to get your attention back again to himself. He didn't know where either Hollis or Gibbs were, but he takes a chance in dropping into the shrubbery outside. Doesn't that look as if he was trying to make a getaway? And that gun he was carrying? If he was really scared of your identity, why didn't he let you see it before? Can you imagine any man, timid or otherwise, letting a suspected person push his way into the house while he had a gun in his pocket?"

"I have been thinking that way myself," Spink said.

"And supposing you were actually impersonated," Dalgleish continued. "It is only a matter of a few hours since the whole affair started. The only place where you have shown your connection with it was at Brimmer's. It must have been someone there who took the opportunity of getting a complete line-up on you. There was no one left at Anthony's to do it. That looks like servants again. These

four men have been in England only four months. All the servants are new, and I don't suppose anyone in particular vouched for them. Possibly all were hired from some employment agency. I tell you, Spink, though we may be looking for someone outside as the main instigator, it would be a wise policy to watch the servants, and I'm going to see that that is done. Whether it is Kwong Heisu operating or not, Norton suggests himself as the next objective, and if there is some servant there . . ."

"Don't you think he should be warned?" Spink questioned, as Dalglish paused.

"I don't think it would be a wise move. For the same reason I am not going to arrest Sedgwick as a suspected accomplice. If the Chinaman is employing the servants, we don't want to let him know that we suspect it. But I'm going to have Sedgwick watched. He may betray himself by some move."

"I think I'll nose along to Brimmer's, and see if I can pick up anything there," Spink said, his first plan baulked.

"I'll have to go too. I have a long trip ahead of me," Dalglish replied. Then he called: "Hollis!"

Hollis came into the room where they were. "I'm going out to Chelmsford now," the inspector told him. "You and Gibbs stay here, and one of you keep Sedgwick under observation all the time. He may try to pull off some tricky stunt like Tomkins did."

"Six miles out," the House Surgeon at the hospital had said, speaking of the scene of the accident. He had not said on which side of Chelmsford, so there was a possibility that Dalglish would pass the wrecked car on his way there.

The night was dark, so he slackened his pace in that neighbourhood, and presently saw the wrecked car in the ditch. He stopped his machine and got out.

With the aid of a powerful electric torch he thoroughly overhauled the wrecked machine. The only thing he discovered was a road map, folded to show the route through Chelmsford to Harwich, which route Beauchamp was following.

Arriving at the hospital, he was conducted by an orderly to the House Surgeon's office. Dr. Garfield, the House Surgeon, remarked as soon as he heard the visitor's name: "Mr. Beauchamp is still unconscious. There is a certain amount of concussion. He must have had quite a bad spill."

"You would think so if you saw the car," Dalglish replied. "The indications are that it turned completely over twice at least before settling right way up in the ditch. He must have been stepping on the gas quite heavily."

"It rather surprised me when an official of Scotland Yard answered my call to his house," the surgeon observed tentatively.

"My duty there was rather a painful one," the inspector told him.

"Surely you were not there to arrest him?"

"Not exactly. You read, of course, the account of the murder of Richard Anthony."

"Yes. Rather gruesome, wasn't it? I have been wondering since I phoned whether Beauchamp knew anything about that."

"You have? Why?"

"Quite a peculiar thing," Dr. Garfield answered. "You know, there are people who read a thing like that, and immediately become filled with fears that they will be the next victims. Then, your being at the house, made me think of the other possibility."

What he said was not very enlightening, so Dalglish waited for him to continue: "Beauchamp has had one spell of delirium. Under the circumstances, I think I can waive the etiquette of professional secrecy, although there was not much that he said in his delirium that was coherent. There seldom is, but what there is usually has a direct connection with something . . . or an imaginary something. His babbling was a confusion in which he mixed Buddha with a masked Chinaman, his main fear being that the masked Chinaman was out to get him. His fear was apparently so acute that we had to administer an opiate to quiet him."

"I wish you hadn't done so," Dalglish said abruptly.

"But, my dear sir," Dr. Garfield expostulated, "under the circumstances it was demanded."

"I quite understand that," the inspector replied. "The reason I wished it had not been done was that his delirium sequences might have supplied information which he has been concealing . . . information which might have led to the arrest of this masked Chinaman."

"Then he really had some connection with the murder?"

"Indirectly. I had thought at first that it might even have been directly. You see, there was another murder committed tonight, in exactly the same manner, and it was committed at Beauchamp's house."

"Good heavens!" Dr. Garfield exclaimed.

"As it happened, Beauchamp was lying unconscious in the ditch six miles from here at the time when it must have occurred. We have the time sufficiently narrowed down to prove that. Otherwise, as I said, I should have arrested Beauchamp on the charge of this second murder . . . possibly the first as well."

"Then that is why you instructed Constable Rooke to remain?"

"Yes. All I can hope for now is to pick up some evidence which will give us a better clue to the identity and whereabouts of the actual murderer. Beauchamp was Anthony's friend and one-time partner. So was Brimmer, the man who was murdered tonight. Beauchamp's delirium proves one thing at least. The masked Chinaman can no longer be regarded as a myth, as we at first thought he was. I hope that nothing that Beauchamp had on him has been touched."

"My dear sir," Dr. Garfield said again. "It isn't our habit to search accident cases brought in. The only thing removed from his pockets was a pocket-book, in which we expected to find evidence of identity. As a matter of fact we did, in the form of his auto license. Incidentally, however, we observed that in the same pocket-book was quite a large sum in Bank of England notes."

"You took my meaning rather too abruptly, Doctor," Dalgleish said calmly. "I spoke too bluntly, perhaps, but you can understand my desire to obtain first-hand anything that will throw light on this double crime. In confidence . . . as I want a free hand . . . I will tell you this. There were four principals in this murder case, no doubt apart

from the murderer. Two of them are dead now, presumably murdered by this masked Chinaman. The second murder was committed while two of my own men were watching Beauchamp's house, thinking that Beauchamp was inside. Instead of that, Brimmer — the second murdered man — had taken his place to give him an opportunity to get out of the country, although I had personally warned him against that. When Anthony was killed, the other three gave information to the effect that his death was purely and simply motivated by revenge. But Anthony's residence was ransacked. So was Beauchamp's tonight — Brimmer's as well. Can you wonder that I am convinced that they are concealing something . . . something which explains their desire for one at least of their number getting clear of the country?"

"It has that appearance, I admit," Dr. Garfield agreed.

"Then does the fact not suggest itself that Beauchamp was in possession of that something for which the murderer was looking?"

"That seems a logical conclusion," the doctor agreed again. "Go ahead, Inspector! I couldn't resist your authority for searching him, but . . ."

"I wish I could make him talk!" Dalglish said savagely.

"I'm afraid you can't do that," Dr. Garfield said. "And that is the exception I would make. As you know, while he is a patient here, I am empowered by statute to prevent your asking him questions which might aggravate his present fevered condition. As I told you over the telephone, he has sustained a broken collar-bone, and a fractured

tibia as well. There is sure to be fever for some time, and . . . ”

“Is he likely to be unconscious long?” Dalgleish asked, somewhat impatiently.

“Probably not. The concussion is only slight.”

“Then, if you don’t mind, Doctor, I’ll take a look at him while he is immune . . . or, shall I say, while I am immune from temptation?”

“I’ll take you to him,” the House Surgeon replied.

He conducted him to one of the private wards, and called the nurse outside, after one glance at the patient, so that she should not be witness of what he considered a disgraceful procedure. He was not sure that Inspector Dalgleish was not exceeding his authority, but he had the consolation of knowing that Beauchamp would not be disturbed by the operation. When Dalgleish came out, without discovering anything beyond the fact that Beauchamp had protected himself well against the need of funds, he brought Constable Rooke with him. There was no further need for the constable to remain, for Beauchamp’s movements would be curtailed for some considerable time. However, he thought it advisable to warn the House Surgeon that his patient was not to be moved without authority from Scotland Yard.

He drove back to Maple Road, Hammersmith. It was late, but he wanted to ascertain if Brooks had discovered anything further. Brooks told him that Sir Basil Coyne was waiting to see him at Scotland Yard. The inspector went there in a not very enviable frame of mind. He had an idea that the interview would not be a pleasant one for

him. Sir Basil Coyne seldom interfered once a case had been relegated to a lesser official.

Neither were his anticipations unfounded. Sir Basil was visibly annoyed. He questioned Dalgleish sharply with regard to his movements since learning that Brimmer had been murdered; and he criticized those movements severely. In his opinion, once having learned that Beauchamp was an impossible suspect with his unconscious alibi, Dalgleish would have done better to devote his time to discovering the real perpetrator of the crime.

"We are soon doomed to have the public doubt the efficiency of Scotland Yard," the Chief said critically. "We have seven unsolved mysteries on our hands, occurring within the past three months, and four of them are in your territory. In the case of that valet, Tomkins, there were more indications of murder than of suicide, in spite of the precautions you took. I allowed it to be taken as suicide to save our own faces until something new turns up to dispute it. Now it is up to you, Inspector, to restore some of our shaken confidence. Get busy!"



THE SCORPION

CHAPTER XII

SPINK RECEIVES PAYMENT IN ADVANCE



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SPINK had much to think about as he made his way from Brondesbury to Hammersmith — much to cause him a considerable amount of worry. First there was that impersonation of himself, if Sedgwick's word could be taken. Whoever was after the 'Light of Buddha' was remarkably quick on the job. That was evidenced by the startling string of events which had already taken place . . . two murders and a suicide within twenty-four hours; three burglaries, and the sending of a copy of the code message to each of Brimmer, Beauchamp and Norton. And it was someone who was watching the movements of everyone concerned very closely . . . closely enough to pick up enough information to impersonate him after that one brief visit of his to Hammersmith that afternoon. That suggested the criminal Chinaman, especially if Tomkins was actually murdered under the noses of the Scotland Yard officials. No one but an Oriental could operate with such uncanny precision. And even at that, it was incredible that the whole chain of circumstances could have been brought about by one hand, working alone. There was doubtless a very subtle mind engineering everything, but with how many assistants to carry out his plans?

That brought in again Inspector Dalgleish's suggestions with regard to the servants, made more possible by Dr. Gleason's remarks about duplicated gloves. These latter suggestions seemed for the moment the more plausible, and more prone to substantiate the theory of Tomkins's suicide. In that case, as likely as not there had been no impersonation of himself at all . . . was merely a subterfuge invented by Sedgwick on the spur of the moment, opening the door to him unexpectedly, before he had had time to make his getaway, indicating that Sedgwick had known all the time that Brimmer had been murdered. As Inspector Dalgleish had again suggested, the fact that he had slipped through the window so unostentatiously indicated a premeditated action on his part. Sedgwick of course would not know where either Hollis or Gibbs actually were, even if he accepted his, Spink's word that they were somewhere outside. Had Hollis not seen him drop, the shrubbery beneath the window would have provided a very convenient temporary hiding-place.

And what connection had Beauchamp's flight, rendered abortive by his accident, had with that? Was it possible that Dalgleish had actually been on the right track? So far as the plans of the partners were concerned, it was Beauchamp who had organized them. It was he who had arranged for Brimmer to take his place in Brondesbury . . . perhaps had already arranged for Sedgwick to complete his destruction there! In which case, had he also arranged for Brimmer's servant to ransack his master's safe during his absence? Only one argument would seem to annul that possibility, and that was the fact that Beauchamp knew, with the others, where the 'Light of Buddha' really was.

But, after all, was that really a substantial argument? It was Beauchamp who had gone to Anthony's flat after he was murdered. Perhaps the whole episode of the copies of the code message was a blind invented by him, to give himself and his accomplices time to finish their elimination of the others, that the 'Light of Buddha' might remain his sole possession. In which case again, why had Norton escaped? But the argument came back again that Beauchamp, if he had planned such a coup, could have operated on the other side of the Atlantic with much greater facility and impunity than he could in London, within the reach of Scotland Yard. Well, Dalgleish had now accepted the idea that Beauchamp was innocent, and according to Spink's arrangement while three of them were living, it behoved him to accept the inspector's belief.

And, in one particular at least, Dalgleish was on the right trail. Vengeance was not the only motive behind it all. Such was the only logical conclusion to which he, or any other sane man could come, when considering the methodical manner in which the effects of the partners were overhauled. How long would it be before the inspector, or someone else from Scotland Yard, unearthed a clue which would indicate the diamond? That was the thought that was worrying Spink most. Knowing the existence of the 'Light of Buddha', he was withholding material evidence of motive. That, in itself, while not exactly the compounding of a felony, was enough to get him in bad with the officials of Scotland Yard, if his knowledge of the diamond ever came to light.

For that reason he changed his mind before he reached Brimmer's residence.. Beauchamp was unconscious in the Chelmsford hospital. Norton was the only one left of the original quartette. With Detective-Sergeant Brooks at Hammersmith, and probably a quota of detectives as well, there was little to be gained by paying Brimmer's residence a visit just then. He spoke through the communication tube, and instructed the taxi driver to take him to Ealing Broadway.

It was after eleven o'clock when he arrived there, but Norton had not gone to bed. As Spink expected, he found him in a state of agitation bordering upon hysteria. The information given to him over the telephone by Inspector Dalglish had unnerved him completely. Spink found him with a gun in his hand, ready to shoot.

"I'm glad you came, Spink!" he said fervently. "I've been trying to get you for the past hour. Have you heard about Brimmer?"

"Yes. I was at Beauchamp's place when Inspector Dalglish called you."

"Then you can tell me all about it . . . how it happened."

"I can't exactly do that, but I can tell you the means Kwong Heisu employed," Spink said.

"Not another scorpion?" Norton gasped.

"Yes; another scorpion."

"Good God! Then Dr. Gleason's antidote was valueless?"

"You know about that?" Spink questioned him.

"Yes. He was here half an hour after you left with some for me. There it is over there on the mantel. Didn't Brimmer use it?"

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"I don't think he got a chance to use it," Spink told him.

"But what was Brimmer still doing there . . . alone?" Norton stammered. "Beauchamp was to have gone back there."

"That is what is rattling the Yard people," Spink said, with annoyance in his voice. "You folks must have been ringing the changes on each other, and they have discovered it. That's as far as I know about it, from what they were saying. I don't think Dalgleish quite knows himself yet what happened between you, but he knows that somehow his men were fooled. He had all of you watched, and two of his men thought they were following Beauchamp to Brondesbury. There must have been another person acting with you, to give the plain-clothes men the idea that you were all three covered, and let Beauchamp get away. Who was it?"

"Williams, Beauchamp's chauffeur," Norton answered. "He was made up to look like Brimmer. Brimmer and I left Hammersmith first, to draw off our contingent, Brimmer taking Beauchamp's car. Then Williams was to tour around for a while in one of Brimmer's cars, to get the rest of them away from the house to give Beauchamp a clear road."

"What was the idea of letting Beauchamp get away?"

"Beauchamp wasn't to get away. What do you mean?"

"I'm not going any farther with this until I have had your explanation, Mr. Norton," Spink informed him tersely, instead of answering his question. "If you people are going to work behind my back, and get yourselves in wrong with Scotland Yard, I'm quitting, and I don't mean maybe."

So, if you want me to continue, let me have the straight dope from beginning to end."

"We were going to tell you as soon as we had an opportunity," Norton said quickly. "It was something you said that gave us the idea, after you had gone. You said there was nothing to prevent Kwong Heisu, or someone working for him, to rent a safe deposit box in the same vault as Anthony's. It occurred to us that one of us could do the same. We didn't want to lead Scotland Yard to Chancery Lane, that was why it was necessary to hoodwink them for the time being. Beauchamp was to rent a box and try to transfer the diamond to it before Kwong Heisu had deciphered the code message."

"And did he?" Spink answered.

"I don't know," Norton answered.

"Nor if he got the diamond?"

"No. We haven't heard a thing from him since we all parted at Hammersmith this afternoon."

"And you probably never would have, except for an accident," Spink said caustically.

"Why? What do you mean?"

"I suppose it was Beauchamp who conceived the whole scheme, wasn't it?"

"As a matter of fact, it was," Norton admitted. "He was always considered the brains of our quartette. But you did not answer my question."

"I'll come to that," Spink replied. "Naturally, Beauchamp didn't inform you that, whether he succeeded in getting the diamond or not, once you had helped him to evade Scotland Yard he was intending to beat it out of the country."



"Why, no," Norton stammered. "He was to go back to to his own place, where Brimmer was to spend the night with him. I don't get what you're driving at, but . . . neither do I understand Beauchamp's silence."

"That's just it," Spink said. "Beauchamp, at the present moment, is in hospital at Chelmsford, in Essex."

"Why did they take him there, if he was hurt in some way?" Norton questioned, amazed.

"They didn't take him . . . not all the way," Spink answered. "He took himself to within six miles of that town, and then drove his car into the ditch. To all appearances he was bound for Harwich and the Continent."

"Heavens! You don't mean that?"

"Sure thing I do. The House Surgeon at the County Hospital telephoned Beauchamp's house while Inspector Dalglish and I were there, trying to puzzle out who murdered Brimmer. Dalglish has been suspicious of Beauchamp being the engineer of the whole murder scheme from the very beginning. If Beauchamp had walked into his own house while we were there, he would have arrested him as the murderer of both Anthony and Brimmer. That telephone message from the hospital was a perfect alibi for Beauchamp, but beyond that it doesn't help us any."

"You mean . . . ?"

"If Beauchamp was getting away with the diamond, Dalglish is going to find it on him."

"Yes, it's hell all right," Spink agreed. "What is more, he is going to look for it, even if he doesn't know what he expects to find. He has a perfectly logical idea that there is something that Kwong Heisu, or whoever is responsible for

this, is looking for. He tried to pump me to see if I knew what it was. I went so far as to suggest that Kwong Heisu would not know that you had disposed of all the jewels. That was of course before I knew that Beauchamp had gone to Chancery Lane to try to pick up the 'Light of Buddha'. If I gave Dalgleish an unintentional clue, you can't blame me for that."

"Of course not," Norton conceded. He asked: "Do you think someone was watching Beauchamp at Chancery Lane . . . someone who had deciphered the code . . . and went to Beauchamp's house thinking he had got the diamond?"

"I thought of that just now," Spink said.

"And finding Brimmer there, murdered him instead?"

"There's only one circumstance against that," Spink said.

"What is that?" Norton queried.

"Someone visited Brimmer's house at about the same time, and turned his house inside out as well."

Norton stared at him, speechless.

"Yes," Spink went on, "I am wondering, too, why they left you out for tonight. It looked as if Kwong Heisu's gang was out to make a perfect clean-up."

"Why do you say 'his gang'?" Norton found his voice again.

"Well, it is evident that Kwong Heisu couldn't be in several places at once."

"I wish we had never seen the diamond," Norton spluttered.

"You probably never will again," Spink was not consoling, "unless you are called upon to identify it in court."

"Some possibility of that," Norton said scornfully. "If Beauchamp was actually decamping with it, Kwong Heisu won't know that."

"If Dalgleish discovers the diamond, nothing on earth will stop the fact from coming out at the inquest tomorrow," Spink assured him.

"There is still a lot of tonight," Norton grumbled.

"I don't think that need worry you," Spink said. Then, thinking of his desire to watch the servants, and recognizing this as a good opportunity, he added: "If it will make you feel any more secure, I'll spend the rest of the night here. There isn't much else I can do. I suppose you won't mind sharing the watch with me."

"I'll say not," Norton answered gratefully. "It's awfully good of you to suggest it. And I am more than pleased to know that you have decided to stay in the affair with us until the menace of Kwong Heisu is removed. Mind you, much as I would like to have it, I sincerely hope this is the last of the diamond."

"Speaking of that," Spink returned, "there is something in connection with it that I want to ask you. Just now there are only two of you who know that I am aware of the diamond's existence. The fact that I know must be kept strictly from Scotland Yard. It wouldn't do for the officials to learn that I have been suppressing material evidence of motive like that. You will be the only one at the inquest, if the diamond is mentioned."

"I quite understand your position," Norton said, readily agreeing to reticence.

"And one other thing," Spink went on. "That is with regard to my remuneration in this business. While I am not exactly mercenary, I don't feel like running the risk of having given my services gratis. Three of you this afternoon promised me payment of ten thousand pounds. Since then another is dead, and a second has attempted to leave the country. Under ordinary circumstances I should be content to wait until I had finished the job. If anything should happen to you, Mr. Norton . . ."

"I will agree to anything you like to request," Norton said shortly. "What do you want?"

"I should like to stipulate a cash payment of half the amount in advance, the balance to be paid if and when Kwong Heisu is captured, dead or alive," Spink said. "In addition, I cannot undertake any longer to protect the diamond unless you recover it, and both you and Mr. Beauchamp leave it strictly alone."

"Such a request is reasonable," Norton concurred. "I am sorry that I haven't that sum in cash in the house."

"A check will do," Spink said. "I have an idea that I am taking a great deal more risk than I at first thought I should, and . . . I have my family to consider."

Without another word, Norton wrote the check. When he handed it to Spink the latter saw that it was made out for the full amount of £10,000.

"This is an expression of appreciation from me personally," Norton said to him. "It has no bearing on the similar amount which we jointly promised you."

"Thanks," said Spink. "I hope I may yet earn it to your satisfaction."

He told Norton nothing of the alleged impersonation of himself. He thought it would do no good to introduce a point which might increase Norton's fear, for the man was almost beside himself already. And he could not very well speak of it without mentioning the suggested complicity of the servants while Norton was in the right mood, if he as much as suspected such a thing, to turn his whole staff out of the house on the spot.

Neither could he carry out another idea which occurred to him. That was apropos of his presence in the house. Norton's man had admitted him, and therefore knew he was there. But, to leave ostensibly, and re-enter unobserved by the servant, which he had considered doing for a moment, would lay himself open to questions which he might find it difficult to evade. So he decided to let matters take their course for the night, and made no comment when Norton informed his man, Peters, that Spink was staying for an indefinite period, and that it was unnecessary for him to remain up.





THE SCORPION
CHAPTER XIII
FURTHER EVIDENCE OF KWONG HEISU



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CHAPTER XIII

FURTHER EVIDENCE OF KWONG HEISU

SPINK and Norton spent the night in the latter's study. Neither of them slept a wink, for Norton was too nervous to compose himself, and Spink thought it inadvisable to let him stay awake alone. Quite early, Peters brought in the first edition of the morning papers. He usually arranged them in the study for his master to read. His surprise at finding Norton still up, and Spink still there, was too ingenuous to be feigned.

The front page headlines were mainly devoted to the latest London mystery, news of which was gradually leaking out. One caption in particular attracted Spink's attention, and he whistled as he observed it.

MASKED CHINAMAN SEEN IN EPPING FOREST

"Look at this!" he said to Norton.

"Read out what it says," Norton replied, agitatedly.

Spink read the condensed statement as follows:—

"Mr. Edward Pringle, proprietor of the Club Tea Rooms near Turpin's Cave on the Old North Road,

reports that he believes he saw the masked Chinaman while passing northwards through Epping Forest yesterday evening. Mr. Pringle states that he became suddenly aware of a large Daimler approaching him from behind at a high rate of speed. In his reflector, he saw this car swerve into a by-trail in the forest. Almost immediately afterwards, a second powerful car skidded round a bend a mile behind him. As it was overtaking him at a terrific rate of speed, Mr. Pringle edged his own car into the ditch to allow it to pass without danger of collision. As it flashed by, to his astonishment, he observed that the sole occupant was wearing a mask, doubtless of Chinese make.

"What makes Mr. Pringle believe that the second car was in pursuit of the first is the fact that shortly afterwards he encountered the masked driver again, going in the opposite direction. Evidently the driver of the first car had taken the by-path to elude this pursuer."

Below was an editorial note.

"Circumstances have since transpired to make us believe that the driver of the Daimler was Mr. Clifford Beauchamp, of 25 Crescent Mansions, Brondesbury. Mr. Beauchamp is at present lying unconscious at the Chelmsford County Hospital. The car he was driving, also a Daimler, was found wrecked six miles from that town."

"That should remove all doubts from Inspector Dalglish's mind with regard to the existence of Kwong Heisu," Spink remarked when he had finished reading.

"It must be Kwong Heisu all right," Norton fumed.
"But . . ."

"We are up against a stronger opponent than we thought," Spink supplied.

"He must have the intelligence of a fiend, rather than of a human being," Norton said. "To pick up Beauchamp's trail like that! Unless he was watching us all at Brimmer's, and received information from some inside source as to where Beauchamp was going. And I don't see how he could do that, as we discussed it strictly among ourselves behind closed doors," he added doubtfully.

"There is the possibility that the solution I mentioned . . . the one acted upon by Beauchamp . . . may be the correct one," Spink replied, though he hardly believed it himself, with his renewed suspicions of the servants, and the thought that Brimmer's man, Wilkinson, might have been listening at the keyhole. However, he still did not mention this to Norton. Instead, he continued: "I explained how simple it would be for an expert to decipher that code message, and so learn where the diamond was hidden. Kwong Heisu may have been watching in Chancery Lane, waiting for one of you to attempt to lift the diamond, after he had sent you those copies. You say that you and Brimmer left first. Had he been watching the house, he would undoubtedly have followed one of you. It probably hadn't dawned upon him that he could obtain possession of the diamond in the same way, or realized that he, a Chinaman, might be watched more closely in the vault than an Englishman would be."

"You are probably right," Norton agreed reluctantly.
"It still doesn't explain why Beauchamp took the North

Road instead of going direct to his own residence as we had arranged. My belief is that he procured the 'Light of Buddha', and was either decamping with it — though I would have trusted him with my life. We all would, we had implicit confidence in one another — or he was taking it to the Continent to find a place of greater security. I prefer to believe that. The question that concerns me more deeply now is whether Kwong Heisu picked up his trail again or not, and stole the diamond before the wrecked Daimler was found. In that case he probably thought Beauchamp was already dead, and didn't bother with him any more."

"The fact that both Brimmer's and Beauchamp's safes were rifled . . ." Spink began; then he hesitated. Again came the thought of the possible implication of the servants . . . that they were confederates of the Chinaman . . . were acting under previously given instructions, not knowing that Kwong Heisu had found the 'Light of Buddha'. As he did not finish his sentence, Norton asked him: "Then you think the rifled safes indicate that he was unsuccessful in finding Beauchamp again?"

"That is what I was going to say," Spink answered. "On the other hand — what made me pause — was the thought that perhaps Beauchamp was not taking the diamond away with him. Kwong Heisu may have jumped to the conclusion that you were trying to hoodwink him . . . that Beauchamp was nothing but a decoy, to give another of you an opportunity to retrieve the stone."

"Which implies again that our plans were overheard," Norton grumbled.

"You won't know whether Beauchamp has the diamond or not until he regains consciousness," Spink struck a different angle, "or whether Kwong Heisu missed the trail, and Dalgleish got it, until we hear what Scotland Yard has to say. We can't get very far by speculating. You could ring up the safety vault people when the office opens, however," he added, "to discover if Beauchamp went there and rented a safe."

"That won't help us at all," Norton moaned. "Beauchamp was to rent a safe under an assumed name. I don't even know what name he would choose. We had no more thought ~~that~~ your confidence was misplaced than we had when we elected Anthony custodian of the diamond."

"You certainly had implicit faith in one another," was Spink's thought, though he did not express it.

Peters entered to announce that breakfast was served. During the meal their conversation touched upon the coming inquest.

"I suppose I'll have to go," Norton remarked.

"Undoubtedly," Spink told him, "unless you want to find yourself under arrest. Besides, with Beauchamp in hospital you are the only one available to give evidence against Kwong Heisu."

"Will you be attending it?"

"I had thought of doing so. Dalgleish invited me to."

"Then perhaps you wouldn't object to staying here until then, and going along with me."

"Yes, I'll do that. I'll give the house a ring first."

Seeing them enter Scotland Yard together from Whitehall, Inspector Dalgleish nodded to Spink, and remarked to

Norton: "As Mr. Spink is with you, Mr. Norton, I conclude you have heard all about Beauchamp."

Norton admitted that he knew. "I telephoned the hospital before leaving," he said further. "They said there was no change in his condition."

"I ascertained that myself," Dalglish returned, "You know where to go, Spink. I'll see you later."

Inquests at Scotland Yard being held *in camera*, there was no one present except the officials and witnesses. Mr. Pringle had been brought in, and Sir Victor Norton, consultant toxicologist at Scotland Yard, was also there. Very little that was new came out, though the whole thing was gone through step by step, commencing with the finding of Anthony's body. Sir Victor Norton confirmed the opinion of Dr. Gleason with regard to the nature of the poison used in addition to the scorpions' venom, and expressed the opinion that the antitoxin Dr. Gleason had prepared would have been effectual if used in time. That was as far as the pathological side of the question was taken.

Norton was called upon to relate the connection he thought existed between the members of the tontine partnership and Kwong Heisu. There was no mention of the 'Light of Buddha'. Evidently, both Norton and Spink thought Inspector Dalglish had found nothing to indicate it. Neither was there anything said with regard to the fact of Beauchamp's side-stepping the plain-clothes men from Scotland Yard. As a result of a previous discussion between Sir Basil Coyne and Inspector Dalglish, the Chief had decided to give Norton sufficient rope to hang himself. Norton, ignorant of that, was immensely relieved that the

subject had not come up. Questioned, however, as to Beauchamp's reason for leaving the city, Norton could only suppose that it was fear of Kwong Heisu that had driven him to make the attempt. He stated his ignorance of the fact that Beauchamp intended to leave.

Sedgwick, questioned, adhered to his original story, which the reader knows was correct. Sir Basil Coyne waived the questioning of Spink with regard to his alibi, and turned to Mr. Edward Pringle.

"You did not think to take the license number of the car driven by the masked man, did you, Mr. Pringle?"

"No sir," Pringle answered. "I was so surprised at encountering a masked driver on the road that it didn't occur to me. Indeed, sir, he was driving so fast, with so much dust created, that I think it would have been impossible to get the number."

"You are sure you were not mistaken about the mask?" Sir Basil asked him.

"I saw it quite plainly," Pringle answered.

"You don't think you were morbidly impressed by the account you had read of the murder?"

"I knew nothing of that until afterwards."

"And you don't think your association with one of Turpin's haunts has engendered, shall we say, a vivid imagination?"

"I think I stated, sir, that I saw the mask quite plainly," Pringle answered, rather indignantly. "I had no object in starting a wild story which apparently coincided with facts."

Sir Basil Coyne sustained the theory of Tomkins's suicide, and the verdict with regard to Anthony and Brimmer was poisoning, administered by Kwong Heisu or some other person or persons unknown. Norton was warned again not to leave London, as also was Sedgwick. Spink left with Norton, but previous to that Sir Basil Coyne spoke to Spink on the side.

"I am glad you are working on this case, Spink," he said cordially. "So far as I am concerned, when it comes to the elucidation of crime, there is no such thing as official jealousy at Scotland Yard. I would like to see you get to the bottom of it quickly, and you have a free hand. Apply to me personally at any time you need assistance, and I will see that you get it. You turned down an offer of employment with Scotland Yard once, but get Kwong Heisu and there is an inspector's job waiting for you any time you like to ask for it."

"Thank you, Sir Basil," Spink returned, agreeably surprised. "Whether I accept your offer or not, you can depend upon me to do my best in this case."

Outside in Whitehall, Norton breathed his relief. The situation had not been as awkward for him as he had anticipated. There had been no mention of the real motive of the crime.

"So Dalglish at least didn't get the diamond," Spink observed as they climbed into Norton's car.

"Personally, I hope Kwong Heisu did," Norton returned. "If he did, it may mean the last of this for me. I should think Beauchamp would have had enough of it too by this

time. By the way, Spink, you didn't say anything to me about your being impersonated at Beauchamp's."

"I omitted it purposely," Spink told him. "If I had spoken of it last night, what would your reaction towards the news have been?"

"You mean . . with regard to your staying in the house alone with me?"

"Yes."

"It wouldn't have made any difference," Norton surprised him by saying. "I knew you were with me at the time the murder was committed, and was prepared to swear to it when I heard Sedgwick's statement."

At Ealing, there was a message awaiting Norton. He was to call the Chelmsford County Hospital. The information he received from there was that Beauchamp had regained consciousness, and was asking to see him.

"I can't go, of course," he said to Spink afterwards, "unless I can get permission from Scotland Yard."

"That might be possible, but it isn't advisable," Spink replied. "It would mean letting Dalglish in on the information. If we can beat him to it, it would be better for one of us to see him first. Besides, Sir Basil Coyne might want an official to accompany us, while Beauchamp naturally wants to tell you about the diamond."

"Can you go?" Norton asked him.

"I can," Spink answered.

"Then take my car. My man will drive you, if you like."

He touched a bell, and instructed Peters to order the car immediately.

In one way Spink was fortunate. Inspector Dalglish had given the House Surgeon instructions that Beauchamp was not to be moved without the sanction of Scotland Yard, but he had forgotten to request that the Yard be notified as soon as Beauchamp recovered consciousness. The House Surgeon used his own discretion, and notified Norton first. As it was, Dalglish had planned another visit to the hospital, and Spink was exactly twenty minutes ahead of him — long enough to get the information he wanted, or all of it that Beauchamp could give him.

The House Surgeon was not inclined to admit him until he produced one of Norton's cards. It was fortunate he had brought it with him.

“My name is Spink, private detective,” he informed the doctor. “Mr. Norton was unable to come himself, so asked me to represent him. Failing Mr. Norton, I am sure Mr. Beauchamp will be glad to see me. I am acting in a confidential capacity in their behalf.”

“In opposition to Scotland Yard?” the surgeon queried.

“Only in the respect that Scotland Yard may be trying to hang something on them which I am equally anxious to disprove,” Spink answered.

“Yes,” the doctor ruminated, “but for the fact that Mr. Beauchamp was here, your Scotland Yard inspector was prepared to accuse him of murdering his friend and partner. He told me as much. In a way, it was fortunate that my patient was unconscious, or I am afraid the inspector's visit would not have improved him any. He doesn't know yet

that his friend Mr. Brimmer has been murdered. I rely on you not to mention it. It might excite him too much. He asked me to telephone both Mr. Brimmer and Mr. Norton."

"I won't excite him any more than I can help, if you will permit me to see him," Spink replied.

"If you don't mind waiting a minute, I'll ascertain his wish in the matter," Dr. Garfield said.

In less time than that he returned to the office, and asked Spink to follow him. Admitting him to the ward, he cautioned him finally: "Please remember, Mr. Spink! No excitement!"

"I'll do my best to avoid it," Spink promised again. "How long may I have, Doctor?"

"Ten minutes."

"Thanks."

"I'm glad to see you, Spink," Beauchamp welcomed him sincerely. "I had forgotten for the moment that Brimmer and Norton wouldn't be able to leave town. If Scotland Yard had left us alone, we could all of us have shown that accursed Chinaman a clean pair of heels."

"You can tell me what you would have told either of them," Spink said, taking a chair by the side of the bed. "But keep your voice down, or the doctor will think you are getting excited."

"I intended to write to them when I got to Harwich," Beauchamp went on.

"Then you were really going to the Continent?" Spink asked him.

"Yes. Thoughts of Kwong Heisu were running me ragged . . . my nerves, I mean."

"You didn't stop to think that by making your own flight good you were narrowing the scope of Kwong Heisu's possible activity?"

"No, I didn't. But I deserve all you can say to me. And all I got. I had no intention of double-crossing them, but . . . you understand the position."

"One they helped to create," Spink observed.

"I wasn't thinking of that then. What I meant was, in a position where we didn't know where that fiend of hell would strike next, it was almost a case of everyone for himself. I would have got away, if the devil hadn't deciphered the code message."

"You know he deciphered it?"

"He must have done. He followed me from Chancery Lane, though I wasn't aware of it until I had passed Waltham Cross. Wearing his mask, too, in broad daylight! I dodged him, but I was so nervous I couldn't drive straight, even when I knew I was clear."

"Some one else reported seeing him in Epping Forest," Spink supplied, as he paused.

"If he had caught me, he wouldn't have got anything but some loose change," Beauchamp added.

"Then you didn't get the diamond?"

"I had no intention of getting it. I did as I had arranged with Brimmer and Norton. Transferred it to another box."

"It is still there?"

"It should be. We agreed I should rent the box under an assumed name. I did, that of James Reynolds. It is in a box directly above Anthony's . . . No. 205. I was lucky to get one so close. A sovereign did the rest . . . made the attendant think I was a regular guy. I've got the combination I set written down somewhere. I'll find it later. It doesn't matter, anyway. So long as they know the diamond is safe, that's all that matters until I can get around again."

There was no doubt in Spink's mind that he was speaking truthfully, so he did not press the question. He said, as he had said to Norton: "Whatever happens, my knowledge of the diamond must be kept dark. Inspector Dalglish is beginning to think you folks are hiding some material evidence which directly concerns the murder of Anthony, and he is nosing around quite a bit. If he comes here again . . . he was here last night . . . you will have to be careful what you say. My knowledge of the diamond, above all things, must be kept from Scotland Yard."

"I had that in mind from the beginning," Beauchamp said. "The last thing we want to do is to compromise you with Scotland Yard."

"And there is another thing," Spink went on. "No one but you and I knows absolutely that your intention was to leave the country. You were followed from Chancery Lane. Well, you could have suspected that you were followed before you got as far as Finsbury Park, and you changed your destination temporarily to throw Kwong Heisu off the trail. As you did not succeed then, you tried the same ruse again in Epping Forest. Dalglish doesn't know anything about

Chancery Lane, though he knows all about your bluff to give yourself a duration of freedom from the attention of his plain-clothes men. Can't you think up some private affair that was responsible for that?"

"Thanks for the suggestion, Spink," Beauchamp said heartily. "There was someone I might have wished to visit."

"A feminine attraction?"

"Yes. And nothing on earth would drag her name from me. You see, it is what the French call a *mésalliance*."

Double-crossing seemed to be a habit with Beauchamp, but Spink smiled. "Nothing could suit the situation better," he said.

There was no time for further conversation. Dr. Garfield opened the door, and came in to feel his patient's pulse.

"No harm done," he said genially, "but time is up. I hope you managed to transact all your business."

"We did," Spink replied. "Good-bye, Mr. Beauchamp. I hope you'll soon be on your feet again."

He and Dr. Garfield reached the door of the hospital as Inspector Dalglish was entering. The inspector's voice showed his annoyance as he saw Spink. He said: "How did you find Beauchamp, Spink?"

"Coming along fine," Spink answered carelessly. "Quite good, after the fright and spill he had."

"He has recovered consciousness?"

"He has," Dr. Garfield answered him. "He asked me to telephone to Mr. Norton, as he wanted to see him."

"Norton couldn't come, owing to the restriction placed

upon his movements by Scotland Yard, so he asked me to come as his proxy," Spink added to that.

"Why was I not informed?" Dalglish demanded of the doctor.

"My dear sir," Dr. Garfield said imperturbably, "your instructions were that my patient was not to be moved without authority from Scotland Yard. You made no request concerning anything else. I acceded to his request and phoned Mr. Norton because, in my opinion, he would have become dangerously agitated had I refused. I have no objection to your seeing him now, on the same condition as I stated last night. With one addition. Please do not mention the murder of Mr. Brimmer."


"You didn't tell him that?" Dalglish turned to Spink.

"I asked him not to," Dr. Garfield answered the question. "Right now that information would be too much of a shock. His condition is far from serious, and I want it to remain so."

"In that case there is not much object in my seeing him," Dalglish returned, rather ungraciously. "Doubtless Mr. Spink will pass on to me the information Mr. Beauchamp gave him."

"Why, certainly," Spink agreed with alacrity. "Norton's chauffeur drove me out. If you like, I'll send him back, with the car, and drive in with you."

What he told Dalglish on the way in was identical with what the inspector might learn later from Beauchamp. Dalglish had dropped his surliness of manner, and they discussed the problem quite amicably. He professed to be



amused at the account of Beauchamp's moral peccadillo. Later he remarked: "I thought their yarn about Kwong Heisu was a pure line of bluff at first. Now there is no doubt that it had a fairly good foundation."

"What beats me is his carelessness in the matter of leaving clues," Spink replied. "Proclaiming himself at the bottom of everything; even having the audacity to appear masked in broad daylight. It's a wonder nobody else saw him."

"He may have had the mask ready to slip over his head just when he needed it," Dalgleish suggested.

"But even then . . . a Chinaman driving an expensive car!"

"That would possibly attract less attention in London than out in the country. Besides, the number of Orientals driving cars in the City is increasing. This must be where Beauchamp turned north in the first instance," the inspector finished abruptly, stopping the car. They had come to the fork with the North Road. "From what you tell me, he must have given you a fairly clear idea of where he turned off to evade Kwong Heisu. Suppose we check up on it, and see how it tallies with what Pringle said."

Spink agreeing readily, Dalgleish negotiated the hairpin bend, and they proceeded slowly northwards. From Pringle's description of the road, Spink recognized the corner to which he had referred. Beyond them was a straight stretch. Half a mile along this they came to the by-trail, merely a wagon route. They could still discern where Beauchamp skidded on the main road in order to make the abrupt turn. Along the trail a short distance were indications of

where Beauchamp had stopped, and where he had walked to get a better view of the pursuing car.

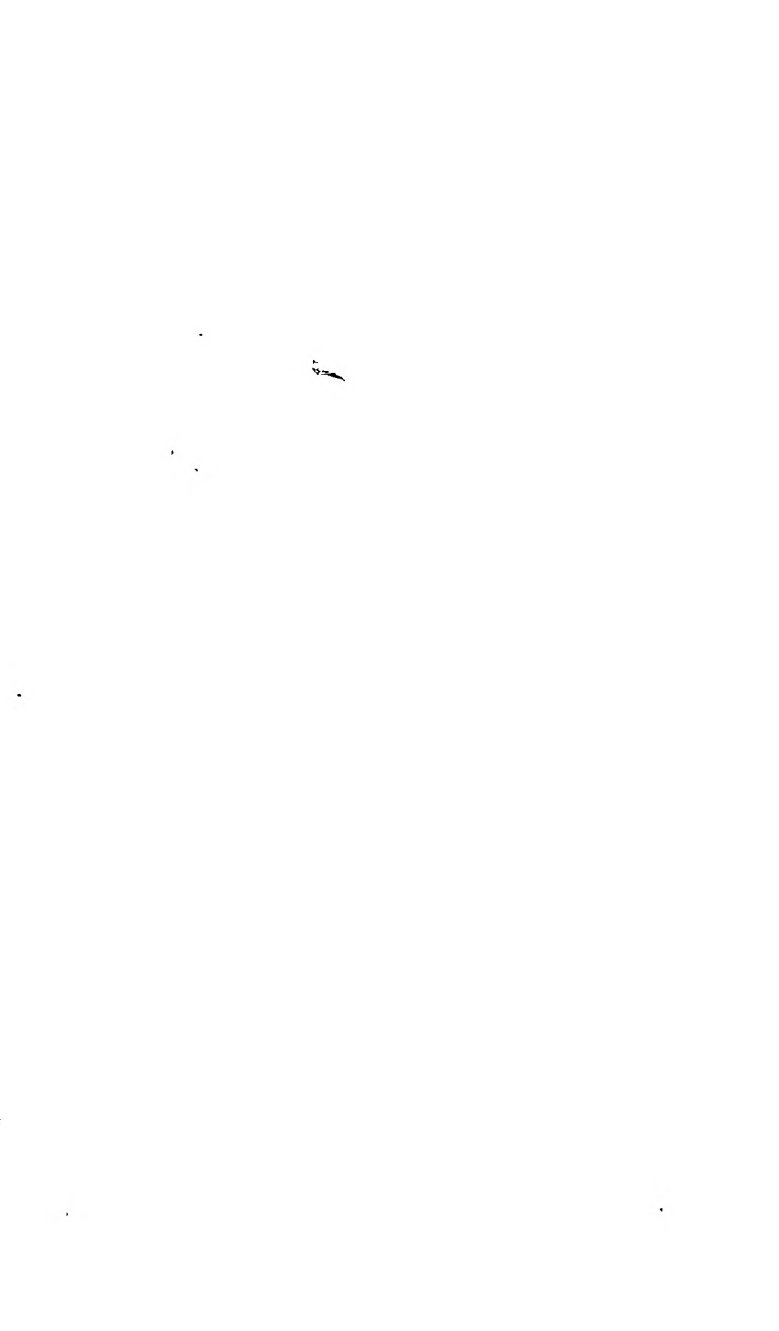
They continued northwards, and located the spot where Pringle had pulled into the ditch, Spink remarking: "It's a pity Pringle didn't think to observe the make of the car the Chinaman was using. Even if he had," he added, after a moment's reflection, "according to what you said just now about the number of Orientals driving cars, the process of elimination would be rather extensive."



THE SCORPION

CHAPTER XIV

SPINK AND DALGLEISH FOLLOW THE SAME TRAIL



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SPINK AND DALGLEISH FOLLOW THE SAME TRAIL

UNTIL he devised another scheme, Spink decided to adhere to his original plan of watching Chancery Lane fairly closely. Norton, when he reported his conversation with Beauchamp to him, was firmly convinced that Beauchamp was acting on the square with him with regard to the 'Light of Buddha'. He believed that the diamond was still in the safety deposit vault, in Box 205, rented under the name of James Reynolds. He was not at all disturbed by the fact that Beauchamp had not revealed the combination. He didn't want to know it, although, with an inevitable reaction, he was again glad that Kwong Heisu hadn't got hold of it. That made his own position less secure, but, with Scotland Yard now thoroughly roused, and accepting the Chinaman as an existing personality, surely something would soon happen to curtail his further activities.

Spink's suggestion that Kwong Heisu probably had confederates working under him had meanwhile engendered other thoughts in Norton's mind. The High Priest of Buddha of the Scorpions might indeed have discovered the wrecked car, to learn that Beauchamp was not taking the

diamond with him, but not in time to prevent his accomplices from carrying out their futile search at Brimmer's and Beauchamp's residences; which seemed to indicate again that he had got word through to them before they had paid him a visit. He could think of nothing else to explain his own immunity in the general clean-up. The thought that persisted most in his mind, as he explained to Spink, was that Kwong Heisu knew by this time that the 'Light of Buddha' was still in Chancery Lane. Spink believed that too, and it emphasized the need of keeping a strict surveillance over No. 347.

Selecting from his repertoire of disguises that of a kerb hawker, the detective took his stand in Chancery Lane at a spot where he could keep good watch over the safety deposit vault without appearing too conspicuously there, and on the opposite side of the street. There he spent the whole afternoon, selling odd articles from his wares, scrutinizing everyone who entered or left, but discovering no one upon whom his suspicions could be centred. Once he was abruptly ordered by a Metropolitan Police constable to "move on, there!", but he showed a badge recognized by the force, which he had held concealed in his hand for the purpose. After that he was not molested. During the four hours that he remained there, only one Chinaman passed along the thoroughfare, a man who failed in every particular to answer to the description of Kwong Heisu as given him by the partners, and he without so much as a glance of curiosity at the entrance of the safety vault. Parking for a lengthy period being prohibited in the Lane, Spink also scanned the passing

automobiles without observing one that passed along twice in quick succession.

Snatching a few hours sleep after the downtown offices were closed, he went again to Ealing Broadway at 11 o'clock, to spend the second night with Norton, and took his stand again early the following morning. Still nothing occurred, and by 5 o'clock it had become apparent to him that Kwong Heisu was leaving Chancery Lane severely alone for the present. During the day Spink had pondered over another course of action.

The fact that seemed evident in the first place was that Kwong Heisu had lost trace of the four partners until he had located them again in London; otherwise, it was reasonable to suppose that so great a period of time would not have elapsed before he made efforts to regain the 'Light of Buddha', which was the prime motive of his crimes. Not only that, but the partners had heard nothing of him until less than three days before, commencing with the murder of Richard Anthony. Kwong Heisu therefore, knowing nothing of their plans, would hardly have been resting all those years in London, waiting on the remote possibility that they would eventually take up residence there, even if all four remained together.

Further than that, there was the matter of the scorpions. Spink had taken advantage of an opportunity, following what he had learned about them from the remarks of Dr. Gleason, to hunt up more information in an encyclopædia. There he had discovered that although the creatures can live for a prolonged time without their natural food, they cannot

long survive the rigours of any climate outside the tropical. He didn't know if there were any of them in the Zoological Gardens, but, if there were, they would surely have to be accommodated in a manner which it would be difficult to duplicate in any private residence. From these thoughts the only conclusion he could draw was that the scorpions at least had been housed but a short time in London. That seemed to suggest that someone in London had located the partners, and had informed Kwong Heisu, he bringing the scorpions with him post haste from China to accomplish the murders. There was, of course, the difficulty of getting them through the Customs to be considered, but Spink dismissed that as underestimating the resourcefulness of a very keen Oriental mind. If drugs could be smuggled into the country, so could scorpions.

One other fact was self-evident. No matter in what way the scorpions were smuggled in, Kwong Heisu himself would require a passport. He might have travelled under an assumed name, but the passport would require a photograph by means of which he could be identified. Even going back over the full period of four months that Norton and his friends had been in England, it should not be difficult to check up on every Chinaman entering the country since then. It also might be possible to ascertain where the High Priest had gone first on his arrival — doubtless to the person who had sent him the information. The whole chain of circumstances was so logical that Spink wondered no one had thought of it before. He would start working on that at once, selecting the East India Docks as his first

objective, that being the nearest port of entry to Limehouse and Chinatown.

The next morning he took the first local train from Fenchurch Street, earlier through trains not stopping at the docks. The fact that he was later saved him from duplicating a lot of investigation. The first thing he observed as he approached the shipping offices from the docks platform was Dalgleish's car, parked in front of the offices of the P & O. He waited for a few minutes to see if the inspector would come out. This he did.

For the first time since the investigation started Dalgleish smiled on seeing Spink. He said genially, accepting the only possible reason for Spink's being there: "Once again our intelligences converge, Spink. Have you been down here before?"

"No," Spink said, "but I admit I was dumb."

"Not much more so than I, although I was a day ahead of you," Dalgleish smiled again. "I have been working from this end since yesterday."

Spink ignored the implied superiority in his words and in his smile, and asked him: "Have you discovered anything?"

"I have. Enough to give us a good lead. Kwong Heisu arrived in England exactly three weeks ago. Further, I have found the taxi driver who took him to the house of Li Ying Hua, on the Poplar side of Limehouse Causeway."

"He travelled under his own name?"

"Yes. Scars on his face, and all."

"The devil!"

"You're right, if you are referring to Kwong Heisu's supreme deity," Dalgleish said drily.

"He certainly worked in the open, with all his cards showing," Spink observed.

"Yes. He may be a High Priest of Buddha, but it looks as if he is relying upon something or someone more supernatural for protection, according to our accepted beliefs. He is so much in the open that we may be more likely to trap him by coming out into the open too, to defeat him at his own game. I am going right now to visit Li Ying Hua. Would you care to come along?"

"Sure thing. Your being a day ahead is much appreciated by yours sincerely."

"I guess I saved you a lot of trouble," Dalgleish acquiesced, as they stepped into the automobile. "You may be able to do as much for me some day."

They found that the house of Li Ying Hua was right in the heart of Chinatown, in a street where the only signs in English were those over the saloons where Taylor & Walker beers were sold. The street, known as Canton Street, a section of the veritable underworld of the Metropolis, might have resembled a similar street in the underworld of Shanghai, being typically Chinese. Even the houses, so far as their construction permitted, had a Shanghaiese appearance. The saloons — there were a number of them — were the only tokens of English-speaking proximity, and they looked peculiarly out of place. Oriental dress, Oriental customs, were the order of the day. The Chinese children playing in the gutters were garbed in sim-

ilar manner to their kinsfolk on the barges of the Yangtse-kiang. Yet the fact that Spink and Dalglish attracted but little attention, unless the children were already versed in the stoical indifference of their elders, who looked on them as it were unseeingly, indicated that the advent of Englishmen, even in an expensive automobile, was not an unprecedented occurrence.

It might be different once they entered one of the houses. Dalglish turned to Spink before they alighted.

"You've got a gun, I hope!"

"Two. One in my pocket, and another under my arm-pit."

"Here's hoping we don't have to use them, for it looks an unhealthy spot to start a rumpus," Dalglish said. "The river is too close, and God knows what underground burrows lead to it. One from every house, I should imagine. I have not visited this quarter before, and I don't suppose you have. Coming out into the open may be the way to trap Kwong Heisu, but it doesn't look so inviting here as it did at the docks."

"I was thinking that," Spink replied. "We mustn't dispense altogether with caution."

"No, and as one precaution I'm going into that next-door saloon and telephone the Yard where we are," Dalglish replied. "If the bounders who sell Taylor Walker here are in league with their cut-throat neighbours, the news will leak through the cardboard walls to Mr. Li all right. It may put him on his guard, but should afford us an adequate degree of protection. Will you wait here while I'm gone?"

Spink nodded, and sat in the car until he returned.

Apparently Dalglish's surmise about the inter-house communication in Limehouse was far from erroneous. Li Ying Hua, as he admitted them, smiling blandly, came out into the open too in a very startling manner.

"Welcome, Inspector, to the house of Li, Son of the Moon," he said, bowing before them.

Both men halted abruptly. In spite of the warning, Spink was taken completely unawares. Not two minutes had elapsed since his companion had emerged from the saloon.

"How do you know who I am?" the question was terse.

Li Ying Hua continued to smile, obsequiously.

"Ev'lybody know Inspector Dalglish of Scotland Yahd," he said. "Him velly big man . . . velly clever. You come makee laid, eh? Me hide nothing. Inspector Dalglish muchee too clever."

Spink felt ill at ease. Whether Li Ying Hua had really recognized Dalglish, or had been warned in the manner Dalglish had suggested, the fact that he was known, even though Scotland Yard had been notified, did not augur so well for them. Li's smile, to him, appeared to have taken on a tinge more ominous than bland, and, as Dalglish had remarked, the river was too close. He heard Dalglish ask the Chinaman: "What kind of a joint is this, anyway?"

"Velly peaceful," Li spread his hands deprecatingly. "Me sellee chop suey, noodles. Velly nice, if you like him." And he smacked his lips invitingly.

"Where are the pipes?" Dalglish demanded irrelevantly,

as if suddenly wishing to camouflage the object of their visit.

"No can do," Li wagged his head sagely. "Me smokee shag. Ev'lyone smokee shag here. Opium no good pidgin."

"Well, we'll have a look," the inspector said curtly, bringing Spink back to realities.

Intent on watching Li, Spink thought he detected a momentary threatening expression in the Chinaman's eyes. The next moment Li was smiling serenely again, though he came once more into the open with another startling speech.

"So you makee laid, eh? Velly well. Me velly glad Kwong Heisu him no stoppee here."

The inspector swung on his heel. "What do you know about Kwong Heisu?" he demanded peremptorily.

"Me leadum newspapers," Li answered imperturbably. "Kwong Heisu bad Chinaman. Say Buddha tellum kill lots people. Buddha tellum that China, all lightee. Velly good; Buddha China big god. No Buddha England; not so damn good. No can do."

He reached behind the counter, and produced a newspaper, on the front page of which several headlines mentioned the masked Chinaman. "Look, see!" he said. "Kwong Heisu killum quick. No damn good!"

"How do you know Kwong Heisu is the masked Chinaman?" Dalgleish asked him.

"Kwong Heisu use mask allee time High Pliest," Li explained readily.

"Say," Dalglish said suddenly, "what's the idea of telling us about Kwong Heisu?"

Li still smiled blandly.

"You savvy Kwong Heisu come here," he said. "You come findum. You no makee opium laid, eh? But you no findum Kwong Heisu. Me tellum house plenty full up. Him go 'way."

"Where to?"

"Me no savvy."

"Why did he come to you, and tell you he was going to kill people?"

"My blother live Shensi. Him sendum. Him think Buddha velly big god. Him think me help Kwong Heisu. No damn go! Me velly peaceful citizen."

"You were not afraid to turn down a High Priest of Buddha?"

Li Ying Hua spat between his fingers in token of his contempt. "Me no longer heathen Chinee," he said.

"So you call yourself a Christian, eh?"

Li's smile betokened wisdom at that. "Buddha, Jesus Ch'ist, allee same. P'laps god . . p'laps not. Me atheist. No believum god. Go to hell, p'laps. Allee same to Li, Son of the Moon."

"All right. Show us the works!"

Li shrugged his shoulders indifferently, and shuffled along in front of them to the back of the apology for a restaurant which comprised the front of the premises. Immediately beyond there were indications that he had been lying with regard to the nature of his business. The house

was a typical Limehouse gambling den, but they had expected this, and it did not interest them. There was probably not a joint in the neighbourhood which was not the same. They followed him into the kitchen, and ascended a back stairway up which, in the ordinary course of Li's business, only privileged and bona fide patrons were permitted to go. Above was a bunk room, each bunk a separate cubicle, with a curtain to screen it; but the curtains were all drawn so that everything inside was revealed. Rightly interpreting Spink's glances about the room, Li explained casually: "No usum opium now. No velly good business. Talk too much. Plenty Chinaman come sleep, and eat bleakfast." And so he rambled on as he conducted them through two or three other rooms of similar nature.

They examined cupboards, but would have found nothing incriminating even had they been making an opium raid, for the implements of Li's trade were skilfully concealed in secret receptacles, to be produced only as occasion required when the coast was clear. There was always the risk of a raid, though Chinatown was seldom disturbed. They scrutinized everything that was visible with keen eyes, looking for traces of Kwong Heisu's place of concealment, but discovering nothing to lead them to suspect that Li Ying Hua was concealing him.

Downstairs again, however, matters suddenly assumed a different aspect. In the room which fulfilled the purposes of a parlor, Dalgleish pointed out a curtain which Spink had not noticed before, and which might camouflage a hid-

ing-place. He said to Li, sharply: "What is behind the curtain?"

"Oh, me forget," Li became apologetic. "Me bedloom. You look see!"

Dalglish strode to the curtain and pulled it back. It covered a door. This he flung open, and stepped inside. So far as he himself was concerned, there was nothing to indicate that it was not as Li had explained it to be. It contained what might be the proprietor's private belongings. As for Spink, however, he could hardly control his tense excitement. On a box by the side of the couch was a typewriter.

With an effort he checked the impulse to mention this find to the inspector. Dalglish knew nothing of the typewritten copies of the code sent to his employers. Instantly on the alert, Spink moved about the room casually, glancing at this and that, until he was in a position to examine the machine more closely. His scrutiny then revealed that it was an *old style Smith typewriter, double keyboard*, and even his quick *examination showed him that several of the key stems were bent!* Undoubtedly it was the machine upon which those copies had been written!

THE SCORPION
CHAPTER XV
KWONG HEISU IS FOUND

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CHAPTER XV

KWONG HEISU IS FOUND

LI Ying Hua, then, was lying. His smirking suavity was intended to cover a tissue of deception from start to finish. Unless — there was such a possibility—he had spoken truthfully in stating that Kwong Heisu did not reside with him, and was keeping his actual residence secret even from his fellow-countryman. Apart from the typewriter, there was nothing to indicate that Kwong Heisu did live there, though, the missives having originated in that room, it was evident that he still used the house . . . might have been there while they were meandering upstairs. There was nothing else to account for Li's premeditated omission of the room, except the fact that the typewriter was in it. Yet if he had thought that the machine would furnish a clue to the origin of those missives, he surely would have taken the precaution of hiding it prior to admitting them. Undoubtedly Kwong Heisu had been in the house, and Li Ying Hua had purposely taken them upstairs to give him a chance to eliminate himself. At this thought Spink felt waves of annoyance surging through him at Dalglish's out-in-the-open policy and the fact that his telephoning from the bar next door had provided the Chinamen with such

timely warning. He wondered if Li would have followed the inspector's policy so speedily had he not been so warned. The fact that he recognized Dalgleish was probably a further falsehood.

Spink felt momentarily glad that the knowledge of the typewriter gave him a distinct advantage over the Scotland Yard official. Spink *knew* the Chinaman was lying; Dalgleish might suspect it, but with no degree of certainty. Spink's remaining patrons, embodied in Norton, were decidedly generous, and, apart from the consideration already shown him by the head of Scotland Yard, Spink felt suddenly desirous of trapping Kwong Heisu himself. He now had a valuable clue which the inspector lacked, and which, even had he wished to do so, circumstances made it impossible for him to disclose. He couldn't disclose it without the whole story of the 'Light of Buddha' coming to the surface.

Looking at Dalgleish as they drove away, it did not require his words to express his disappointment at drawing a potential blank in the house of Li Ying Hua. It had been a comparatively simple matter to trace Kwong Heisu from the docks to Li's; tracing him anew from there would present innumerable complications. There would be racial cunning and antagonism against police interference to contend with, to say nothing of the fact that inter-house communication in Chinatown by secret passages was a well-known thing. Limehouse is honeycombed with subterranean tunnels into which it would be an act of temerity for a police force en masse to venture. So Spink interpreted

what was passing through Dalglish's mind even before the inspector said: "God knows if he was telling the truth, Spink! You didn't see anything to suggest a secret exit, I suppose?"

"Nothing at all," Spink answered.

"Yet we know they exist," Dalglish continued. "Li Ying Hua's place may be the centre of a network of them. What Li said about coming from the Province of Shensi may or may not be the truth, but if anyone sent Kwong Heisu word to China that the four men had settled in London, it was undoubtedly Li, probably arranged for years ago when Kwong Heisu was setting the spies to trace them. Li's denunciation of Buddhism was a trifle too ready, don't you think? Where he picked up the meaning of the word atheist I don't know, but I do know that, whether they practise religion or not, a Buddhist is too fanatical to renounce absolutely his creed unless he swings completely over to the Christian side of the fence. Then, of course, the world has lost at least one potential criminal Chinaman, and he ceases to interest us. On the whole, though we drew a blank — perhaps thanks to me, you may be thinking — I own I may have been a trifle impetuous — I think Li needs watching. But I am going to act on the other supposition first . . . that Kwong Heisu's baggage didn't find harbour with Li . . . and see if I can't locate the transfer agency that took it wherever it was taken to."

"Then the taxi driver did not take along his baggage as well?" Spink queried.

"He says not. Apparently Kwong Heisu was in too big

a hurry to wait for it to be passed through the Customs. Would you care to run out to the docks again with me?"

Spink agreed, thinking he would like to know that point too. But, at the Customs office at the docks, they drew another blank. The clerk there distinctly remembered that Kwong Heisu's luggage had been picked up by two Chinamen. It was therefore useless to carry that line of investigation farther.

Spink would have liked to avoid the return drive with Dalgleish. He felt again guiltily conscious of his knowledge of the 'Light of Buddha', and of the fact that Kwong Heisu had used the typewriter at Li's. And, indeed, he could conceive no need for the reticence his employers had placed him under. If Kwong Heisu ever came to trial, he was sure to mention it, although there was the chance that the High Priest would never allow himself to be taken alive. And, suppose they had come right out with the existence of the diamond as the ultra-incentive for the crimes, it was unlikely, in the circumstances under which they had purloined it . . . if their story was true . . . that Scotland Yard would order its return to the Buddhist, who, advertising himself so flagrantly as the author of the murder of Richard Anthony in the first place, could not fail to pay the extreme penalty for that crime. Whatever power of life and death Kwong Heisu might have in China, in England the taking of the law into his own hands would never be countenanced. No, undoubtedly they were wrong in enforcing such reticence, but his hands were tied; and he knew, so convincing was his discovery in Limehouse, that he might betray his

self-consciousness should Dalglish again try to pump him. But he need not have worried. Dalglish had evidently concluded that he had no information beyond what he himself had, and did not make a single remark to cause him discomfort.

On the way back, during the lulls in the conversation, Spink began to form new plans for getting into the premises of Li Ying Hua again. If those secret passages mentioned by Dalglish existed, and he had no reason for doubting it, it was only from the inside that Kwong Heisu could be traced. In one way, getting into the house presented no really insurmountable difficulty. He had come sufficiently into contact with dope addicts to believe that he, coached a little perhaps by a medical friend of his, might easily simulate an opium smoker. He also believed that Li Ying Hua had opium pipes concealed on the premises, though it was surprising that such a chance visit as theirs did not discover at least a few of his narcotic customers in the house, either sleeping under, or recovering from, the effects of drugs. It occurred to Spink that Kwong Heisu might have banned the use of the pipe while he himself was using the place, to avoid complications should he be traced so far. The detective tried to dismiss that thought, however, for such a restriction would prevent him from carrying out his plan. Even if he did get in, there were still one or two other difficulties to be overcome.

In the first place, the opium den was above stairs, while the room in which the typewriter was, evidently the one used by the masked Chinaman, was on the ground floor. It

was there too that any exit connecting with the network of underground tunnels would naturally be located. That would be a difficulty hard to surmount, the second much more simple. That second problem was with regard to swallowing any of the opium fumes. But he knew he could overcome that, once Li Ying Hua had left him alone with the pipe. He had a small suction syringe with an outlet valve. He thought he could attach that by means of a piece of rubber tubing to the mouthpiece of the pipe, and use it as both inhaler and exhaler of the opium smoke until the pipe was exhausted, leaving himself keenly alert to what was going on.

As so frequently happens, the best laid plans go astray. Spink's carefully devised scheme for hoodwinking the Chinamen was delayed in execution. Other matters were already developing to exact his attention.

Dagleish dropped him by the Corn Exchange, and he made his way to his downtown office. He found his partner, Conway, there.

"Have you finished with the Tolford enquiry?" was Spink's first question to him. It would be a relief to know that Conway was free, in case he had to turn to him for assistance.

"Yes," Conway said. "I got a settlement last night. I was waiting for you to come in this morning, as I couldn't get you at your home last night. How's the Chinaman coming along?"

"He's getting my goat," Spink answered, and went on to relate something of the latest developments, Conway being

in his confidence. He had not proceeded very far with the story when the phone rang. He answered it. It was Inspector Dalglish speaking.

"We're in for another trip, Spink," Dalglish told him.

"Where to?" Spink asked.

"Gravesend."

"What for?"

"To identify a dead Chinaman," Dalglish astonished him. "Tell you more when I see you. I'll call for you now, and then we'll fetch Norton. We'll get there quicker by car than by train, for there isn't one for another hour."

He rang off before Spink could ask any more questions.

"What the devil!" Spink exclaimed.

"Who was it?" Conway enquired.

"Dalglish. He's coming for me right away. Another Chinese mystery."

"Some connection with the masked Chinaman doubtless?"

"I imagine so."

"Dalglish been working with you right along?"

"No. We've kind of butted against each other until this morning when we met at the East India Docks. I wonder what it is."

He was not left long in doubt. Dalglish must have started immediately he rang off.

"Hullo, Conway!" he greeted Spink's partner as he entered the office. "I guess you're up to date on our Chinese murder case."

"Almost. I was just hearing about your visit to Limehouse. I don't think Spink had finished, however."

"You know enough to know why we went there?"

"Yes."

"Well, Spink," Dalgleish turned to him, "for once in his life, if never before, Li Ying Hua was telling the truth."

"You mean?"

"The Chinaman we are going to identify, with Norton's assistance, picked up at the ferry landing stage at Gravesend, has all the earmarks of being our friend Kwong Heisu. As the body has been in the murky waters of the Thames for three weeks, Li was about right when he said that Kwong Heisu had paid him no more than a fleeting visit."

"Then he has already been identified?" Spink asked, amazed.

"More or less . . . not with any degree of certainty, of course," Dalgleish answered. "Following the inquest, a description of the wanted man, with what little information we were able to supply, was circulated as a matter of routine. About the only sure feature we could mention were the scars on his cheekbones. Finding this body, with such scars, the Kent County Police telephoned the Yard for any more complete description which had since become available. I obtained the passport description yesterday, and had filed that at headquarters. That tallies exactly with the body found in the Thames."

"But . . . if he has been in the water three weeks?"

"It makes matters a little more complicated, doesn't it? Here were we just settled down to the firm belief that Kwong Heisu was operating in person, and now we are back again at the point where it probably wasn't Kwong

Heisu at all. It lifts our little case out of the simple rut of the ordinary Chinese vendetta — or whatever they call it — and indicates more clearly than ever that there must have been some other motive distinct from that of mere vengeance. Question is, what is it?"

"So that," Spink thought, "is the motive underlying your unprecedented fraternizing, Mr. Dalglish. You still believe I have inside information, and are trying to make me make a break." Aloud, he said: "There is still a chance that the Kent police are mistaken."

"That is why it is imperative to take Norton down there to finally identify the body." Dalglish returned.

"How did he get into the water?" Conway asked.

"Stabbed between the shoulders," Dalglish told him. "Then stripped to make identification more difficult. No one would bother much with an undesirable alien, anyway."

"But . . at Gravesend? If he travelled so far down the river in three weeks, it is a wonder the tide and stream did not carry him out to sea, isn't it?"

"Which is probably what his murderer thought would happen," Dalglish said. "He became entangled, however, in some of the rigging of the ferry pier, apparently, and has only now broken loose."

"Then the murderer was probably Li Ying Hua," Spink observed, thinking again of the typewriter, and the origin of the code copies. He was thinking that possibly Kwong Heisu had told Li of the manner in which he would attempt to regain the 'Light of Buddha', and do his victims to death. In which case Li's contempt for his one-time re-

ligion was not assumed. Either he, or someone working with him . . .

"I shouldn't be surprised," Dalglish was saying. "If not, Li would have less difficulty in securing accomplices than Kwong Heisu would. Here is one point in connection with that, too. Kwong Heisu was in China when Anthony and Company engaged their servants. If they were planted . . ."

"It seems to me that argument is already defeated . . . the inclusion of the servants, I mean," Spink remarked drily. "That is, of course, supposing Li Ying Hua originated the murders. He wouldn't know . . ."

He was thinking that Li Ying Hua could not possibly have known about the diamond, or he would never have bothered to inform Kwong Heisu at all. That was nearly on his tongue, but he checked himself abruptly. Hell! He was nearly caught. And he could see Dalglish's drift . . . his matter-of-fact talk. He would either have to be more careful, or label himself permanently an idiot. Dalglish appeared to start at the abrupt pause, too.

"Well? Wouldn't know what?" he queried.

"Exactly what Kwong Heisu intended to do," Spink recovered himself. "He wouldn't wait for Kwong Heisu to arrive in England, to be murdered himself, before he proceeded with his proxy murders. There's no point to it."

"There is a point to it, and it is precisely that to which I refer," the inspector returned meaningly. "Kwong Heisu arrived in London looking for something. That something

evidently appealed to Li Ying Hua as a desirable possession. What was it?"

"Search me," Spink answered vaguely. Then, before Dalglish could ask any more questions, he himself asked: "What will you do if the body proves to be that of Kwong Heisu? Arrest Li?"

"Hardly . . . for two reasons," Dalglish smiled. "First, Scotland Yard would be interested in knowing the real motive for the murders, and Li may yet be caught continuing his search. Second, beyond the fact that Li admits — states, rather — that Kwong Heisu paid him a visit on arrival, we have absolutely nothing to pin the murder of the Chinaman in the Thames on to him. And I don't think that could be done very easily. However, let's get hold of Norton, and try to settle one question first. Have you told him?"

"No. I expected you to."

"I didn't; so give him a ring now. Don't tell him on the phone what we want him for."

Norton was in. In twenty minutes they picked him up, and set out for Gravesend. On the way Dalglish explained where they were going, but omitted to mention how long the body had been in the water. Norton's excitement at the intelligence was great enough already, and the inspector did not want to increase it by going over the arguments concerning Kwong Heisu's possible proxy again. Time enough for that if the body was identified. In the sudden confusion of not knowing the actual murderer of

his friends lay the best chance of getting at the information he wanted.

The body in the mortuary at Gravesend was terribly bloated from the length of time it had been in the water, but one glance at the face of the dead Chinaman, diabolical even in death, was enough for Norton.

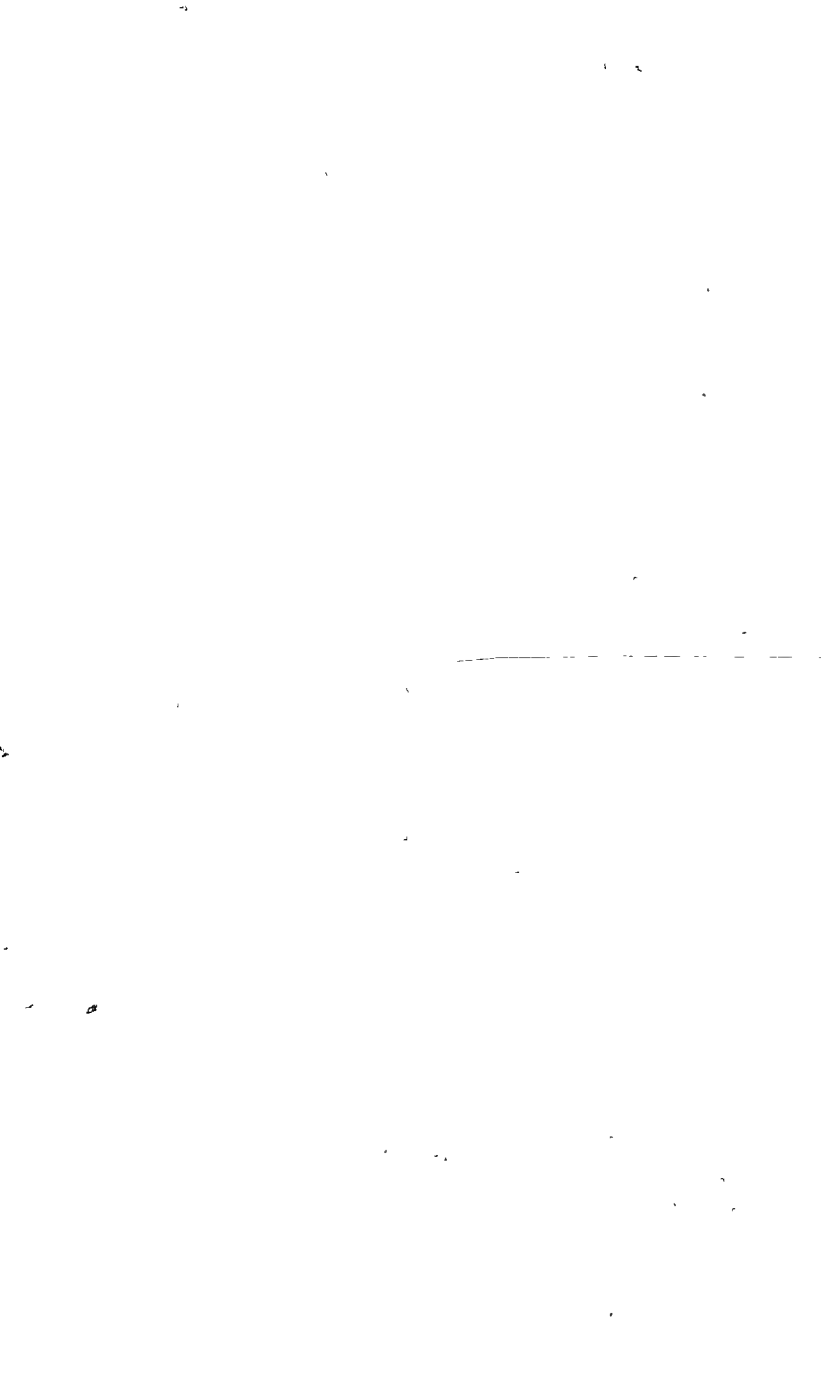
"Take me out!" he gasped, terrified at the nauseating spectacle. "That is Kwong Heisu all right!"

There was one thing that Spink observed before he left the mortuary . . something he did not mention to the Scotland Yard official.

Two of Kwong Heisu's toes were missing!



THE SCORPION
CHAPTER XVI
NORTON RECEIVES A WARNING



CHAPTER XVI

NORTON RECEIVES A WARNING

THE Inspector of the Kent County police stopped Dalgleish with a question as Norton staggered out of the mortuary clinging to Spink's arm. It had reference to the disposal of the body, and Dalgleish could not avoid waiting to answer it, though his annoyance was plainly visible on his face. And it gave Spink the opportunity of a moment's conversation with the abject man clinging to him for support, for Norton had recognized the fact that Kwong Heisu's death was not recent, as he had built up hopes on the journey down.

"For God's sake keep your nerves together!" Spink said, quietly but savagely. "I'll explain later, but just now Dalgleish is out to trip you about the diamond."

"But that body . . it must have been in the water many days!"

"Yes, I know. Dalgleish knew it before we came down here. He didn't tell you, that's why I say he is trying to trip you. For my sake you must be careful."

"But . . who murdered Anthony and Brimmer?" Norton was stammering as Dalgleish joined them. Seeing Dalgleish,

to Spink's relief he added: "Kwong Heisu has been dead too long."

"That is exactly what we are anxious to discover . . Mr. Spink and I," Dalgleish answered his question. "If you are sure the stinking body in there is Kwong Heisu, then he didn't do it. Here is how matters stand, so far as we know them. Your friend Kwong Heisu landed in England three weeks ago. We discovered that this morning. Spink will tell you all about that later. He had come from China presumably to take vengeance on the despoilers of his temple. Some one else, anxious to eliminate him from possible interference, promptly sticks a knife in his back, dumps him in the river, and proceeds to accomplish what he had prevented Kwong Heisu from doing. That seems to me a strange kind of philanthropy . . unless there was something more attached to it. No one would be so accommodating as to murder him, and then kill his enemies out of remorse."

"Kwong Heisu probably told his successor that valuable jewels were stolen from the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions," Norton answered. He had regained his composure almost completely. The thought had occurred to him that, with Kwong Heisu dead, there was no danger of the existence of the 'Light of Buddha' being authoritatively revealed. "To a professional cut-throat that would be sufficient incentive for murder."

"Possibly," Dalgleish grunted, disappointed and unconvinced.

"And Kwong Heisu wouldn't know that the jewels had been disposed of," Norton expressed another thought. "And,

apart from the jewels, the wealth my friends and I have acquired would be incentive enough, especially if the murderer had visions of fixing the guilt upon the person who originally planned it, and, but for the accident of drifting against the wharf here, whose dead body might never have been found, or found miles out at sea without danger of being traced at all."

"You seem relieved that Kwong Heisu met with perhaps a better fate than he deserved," Dalgleish commented, forced again to accept his failure. He had brought Norton to Gravesend without getting any farther in his search for motive.

"As a matter of fact I am . . . immensely relieved," Norton further astonished both him and Spink. "I don't deny that Kwong Heisu's successor ~~has~~ acted with a fiendish cunning equal to what Kwong Heisu himself could have exhibited, and that the danger to Beauchamp and me has not altogether passed; but, with the published knowledge that Kwong Heisu was murdered before the other crimes were committed, the actual criminal will be warned that he cannot work under that cover any longer. Further, he'll know that all responsibility now rests on his own shoulders, for three weeks in the water, dead, gives Kwong Heisu an indisputable alibi."

"You're right!" Spink ejaculated, warmly commending, though not understanding, Norton's sangfroid. There was still danger from Li Ying Hua and his gang, of whom Norton was of course ignorant. "As soon as this is published, the masked Chinaman *must* cease to exist!"

Spink's feeling that this was the correct attitude, also Norton's confidence, were not of long duration, however. Spink accompanied Norton to his home in Ealing Broadway, and went in with him. He had yet to tell him as much as he thought advisable of the morning's experiences. The servant had barely admitted them when Norton suddenly stood paralyzed, his staring eyes resting on a letter upon the hall stand . . . a letter which had arrived by the afternoon's mail. Spink, puzzled, saw it too, and reached beyond Norton to pick it up, as Norton seemed unable to do that himself. It was in an envelope similar to that in which the copies of the code message had come, and had again been posted on Ludgate Hill. Moreover — what had first attracted Norton's attention — the typewriter impressions were the same, with the same irregularities, as also in the letter when he tore it out in response to a gesture from Norton. The letter, in English, and brief, was enough to cause stupefaction in Norton, and in Spink an amazed incredulity at its audacity. There was no address, no salutation, and no date. It read:

"The Light of Buddha has been removed from Box 207. Either you or Beauchamp has it. If you value your life, it must be in my hands within three days. Two have already died the death of the scorpion. You will be the third, unless you pay heed to this.

"Beware of showing this to Scotland Yard. The police cannot get me, but I will get you.

Kwong Heisu."

Written on the typewriter he had examined that morning! Spink's amazement increased as he stared at it after reading it aloud. No wonder the address at which the diamond was to be delivered could be omitted! It was written after he and Inspector Dalglish had left the house of Li Ying Hua. Not necessarily, he reflected. It might have been written before, and still not posted until 10.30 a.m., little more than an hour after they had reached the city!

Norton staggered to his study, and Spink stumbled after him. The amazing array of facts that letter conjured up was overwhelming. And it had shattered immediately Norton's new found belief in his future security.

"God!" he exclaimed, as he shut the study door and faced Spink. "I don't get it yet!"

"I do," Spink said grimly. "Sit down, and I'll explain a few things I haven't had a chance to explain yet . . . things that Dalglish hinted at in Gravesend when he said I would tell you later."

"Let's have a drink first," Norton groaned, going to a decanter wagon. "I sure need one!"

"Give me a whiskey neat . . . a stiff one!" Spink suggested, with alacrity. Ordinarily abstemious, he felt he needed the bracing effect of the spirit.

"Even if I had the diamond, how should I know where to deliver it?" Norton voiced his thought, before Spink had started to explain.

"You don't know . . . but I do," Spink astonished him. "The writer of the letter knows that I was looking at that

very typewriter this morning. And, moreover, he left it around on purpose for me to see it!"

"I still don't get you," Norton faltered.

Spink proceeded to explain. "Out of these incidents," he finished, "these items seem to resolve themselves. First there was someone in the bedroom claimed by Li when he took us upstairs, omitting to show the room. Second, that person is no Chnaiman, for no Chink could write such perfect English. Third, the writer must be the same person who impersonated me at Beauchamp's, before he killed Brimmer. Therefore, he not only saw me, but knew me, when I went into Li's with Dalglish, unless he saw me while I was sitting in the car outside while Dalglish telephoned Scotland Yard."

"But he signs himself 'Kwong Heisu'!" Norton objected.

"He wouldn't know then . . probably doesn't know yet . . that Kwong Heisu has been recovered from the river."

"He would surely know that such diction couldn't come from a Chinaman!"

"Undoubtedly, if he stopped to think. The cleverest criminals make breaks. This may be his oversight. I thought Kwong Heisu was clever, but this impersonator of him and me is damnably so. He assumed the personality of Kwong Heisu, his mask, his scorpion . . even his method of working . . but he forgot to assume his language. Or perhaps he doesn't care, feeling too secure behind the mask of Kwong Heisu."

"But Kwong Heisu would not reveal so much to an Englishman he didn't know," Norton objected again.

"No; but he probably told Li Ying Hua, and Li would know where to obtain the assistance of a professional cracksmen," Spink replied. "There is one unfortunate circumstance about it too," Spink continued thoughtfully. "If he does know that Kwong Heisu has been found, and still writes such a threatening letter, it means that we have by no means finished with him. Sheltered by the cunningest crooks in the world — the Chinks of Limehouse — he feels perfectly secure in making demand for the diamond. He also knows that Scotland Yard is upaware that there is such a diamond involved."

"Hell!" Norton exploded again. "If I had it in my hands I would give it to him right now."

"Would you take it to Limehouse to him yourself?" Spink questioned, ironically.

"Why . . . no," Norton admitted, abashed.

"You would ask someone else to risk never coming out alive?"

Norton looked at him appealingly. His words were apologetic. "You are not going to drop us now, Spink?" he asked.

"No," Spink forced a smile. Norton was the one weakling in the original quartette, but he had recognized that all along. "Neither am I carrying any diamond into Limehouse, to hand it over to a man who has committed at least a triple murder to get it. I am not given to heroics of that description. Do you think I would be allowed to come out of Li's house alive, he knowing that I am a detective, to lead a police raid in afterwards and arrest him as an accom-

plice, even if the master criminal got away? And apart from that, the diamond isn't yours to give him. It belongs to you and Beauchamp, and I doubt if Beauchamp would give his consent. He alone has the combination to box 205, and I am sure he would never give it to you for that purpose."

"No," Norton sneered, recalling Beauchamp's attempted flight under the cover his partners had provided. "I have a time limit of three days, while he is perfectly safe in the Chelmsford hospital."

"He'll still command all the attention if they get you first," Spink reminded him.

"That thought should weigh with him," Norton said. "If I could see him, I might persuade him. There wouldn't be so much risk in ascertaining this second Chinaman's postal address, and mailing the combination to him."

Spink smiled again. "Don't you believe it," he said. "That crook has evidently tried the ruse Beauchamp pulled off . . . once. With greater facility than if he had been a Chinaman. But he wouldn't try it a second time. He would be afraid of walking into a trap."

"Then you think nothing can be done?" Norton asked wearily, anxiously.

"I have been thinking of several things," Spink told him. He continued: "The person who wrote that letter is an Englishman, and educated. He must frequent Li's house, and therefore it should be possible to find out who he is . . . watch him enter or leave, I mean, and trace him to where he lives. But Li's house can't be watched from the outside in the ordinary way."

"Why not a Chinaman?" Norton queried, becoming more enthusiastic. Spink had already demonstrated his ability in disguises.

"A perfectly good suggestion . . . if I could speak their lingo," Spink was sarcastic. "I should probably be on the street about five minutes or less before some Chink or other would speak to me. No; if anything is done at all, it will have to be from the inside. I have still to think of the best expedient."

"There are only three days," Norton reminded him, again anxious.

"Yet still three days," Spink replied. "I will have a consultation with my partner, Mr. Conway. I told him a couple of days ago, and again this afternoon, that I might have to bring him in on this. As it happens, he has just finished the case he was working on. Let me talk to him on the phone, will you, please?"

"Certainly. Go ahead."

Spink rang the office. Conway was in. "Say," Spink said to him, "you haven't accepted anything else yet?"

"Nothing has come in," Conway answered.

"Good. I'm coming right over."

"My partner is free," Spink turned to Norton. "Between us . . ."

"Don't spare any expense," Norton did not wait for him to finish. "Get me clear of this mess, and you can name your own additional charge. I won't kick."

"It wasn't that I was thinking of," Spink said. "I am satisfied already. There was a possible excuse for Kwong

Heisu, however, but there is none for his murderer, and the usurper of his identity. And I've got a case against him myself, for his impersonation of me, and his attempt to get me seriously implicated."

He took a taxi, and went at once to the office.

"That dead Chinaman was Kwong Heisu all right," he told Conway. "Norton identified him quite easily."

"Then there is someone else mixed up with it," Conway replied. "Some other Chinaman perhaps who knew about the diamond."

"No. An Englishman. And, whoever it is, he's not letting the grass grow between his toes. He deciphered that code message I told you about . . . has, in fact, written to that effect to Norton. The reason he wrote was that he had been to Chancery Lane, and had found the safe empty. Now he has given Norton three days to hand over the diamond."

"That's all right," Conway commented, "but where?"

"At Li's house."

"He said that in the letter?" Conway was amazed.

"No. But he evidently wrote the letter after I was there with Dalglish this afternoon. Moreover, he knew I had seen the typewriter there on which the copies of the code were written. Can you beat that for audacity?"

"He has a strange confidence in his own security," Conway answered. "He knows that you can't reveal what you know without admitting your reticence about the diamond, and he apparently concludes, from the fact that it hasn't been mentioned at all in connection with the case, that the existence of the diamond has been kept from Scotland Yard,

which means that whatever you do you will have to do alone."

"With your help, I hope."

"You want me to come in on it?"

"I do."

"That's fine. By the way, Spink, have you eaten at all since breakfast?"

Spink had forgotten about eating. He said: "No; the day has been too full of excitement."

"Then we'll close the office and remedy that," Conway said. "We can talk while you are eating"

"Won't do," Spink replied quickly. "If I am being watched by . . . suppose we call him The Scorpion, for want of anything better . . . he . . ."

"Is pretty sure to know by this time that we are partners, so that won't make any difference," Conway interrupted him. "If I go home, and you follow me there, he'll follow you. So what's the difference?"

Spink yielded to the argument, and they went to a quiet restaurant in Holborn. It was not a busy time of the day, and there were few customers. None entered while Spink ate a lunch, and Conway drank a cup of coffee.

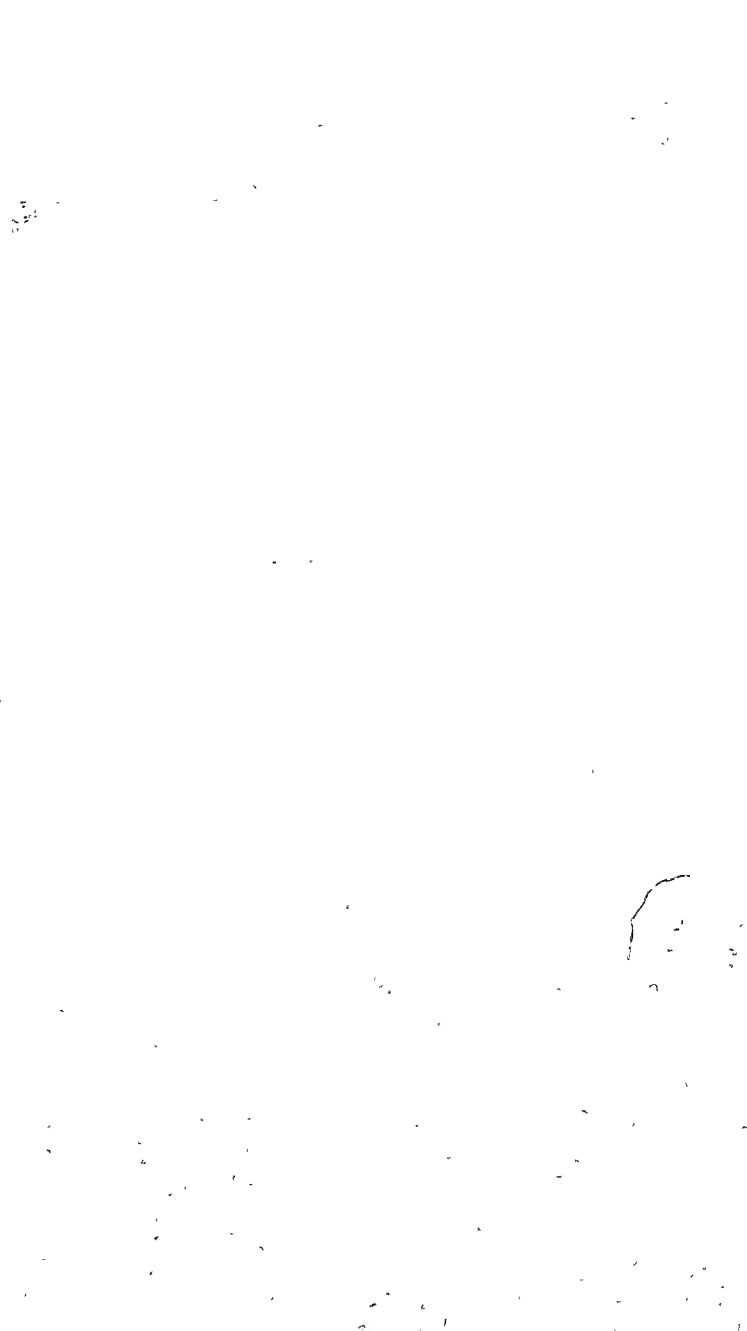
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THE SCORPION
CHAPTER XVII
TUNNELS AND SEWERS



CHAPTER XVII

TUNNELS AND SEWERS

“**W**HERE do you want me to step in?” Conway asked presently.

“Not a very pleasant job,” Spink smiled. “Kwong Heisu’s body entered the river through the sewer.”

“There were indications of rats?”

“Yes; two toes bitten off. There is not a great distance from Limehouse to where that particular sewer enters the river, from below the docks, or it might have fared worse.”

“But,” Conway objected, “with the river so close, you wouldn’t think anyone would risk carrying the body to a manhole, even in Chinatown, with the chance of being discovered while he had the trap lifted.”

“That is true,” Spink agreed. “But I don’t think that was the way it was done. Do you remember that Poplar case some years ago . . . the house that was burnt down?”

“Now you mention it, yes. Beneath the gutted ruins the police found a trap in the floor, with steps below.”

“Yes; and at the bottom of the steps was a door opening into a sewer, a door that could be opened and closed from either side. A month earlier the police had had word that a

wanted criminal was hiding in that house. They raided it, and didn't get him. That was the way he escaped."

"Now I get what you meant by an unpleasant job," Conway grimaced. "You want me to check along the sewer with the expectation of finding a similar exit beneath Li Ying Hua's."

"I thought there would be time for both of us to work it, if we can get into the sewers today," Spink returned. "Suppose we go to the Commissioner of Public Works, and have a look at the blue prints."

The Commissioner's secretary readily gave them permission to examine the blue prints in the Sewage Department of the office. They were not long in discovering what they wanted. In the network of sewers beneath Limehouse and Poplar there was one, the main artery of Sewer No. 179, passing under the east side of and not ten yards from Canton Street, and therefore directly under Li's abode. There was no indication of a manhole within two hundred yards of the house. If the body of Kwong Heisu had been injected into the sewer, there was therefore every possibility of a secret manhole.

They had barely made this discovery, when one of the Assistant Engineers came into the room where they were.

"Mr. Peabody told me you gentlemen were here," he said. "My name is Carruthers. Is there any way I can help you?"

"There is, Mr. Carruthers," Spink answered, indicating on the print with his finger. "We want to get into this sewer, No. 179, just about here."

"What's the idea?" Carruthers asked. "What's going on in Chinatown?"

Spink told him the main features of the case, so far as they were concerned. "We are working independently of Scotland Yard, although I have full authority from Sir Basil Coyne," he ended, "so we would like you to keep what we are doing under your hat."

"I understand," Carruthers said. "If there was such a door as you suggest, it might easily escape the notice of the sewer men, whose main business is the maintenance of the flow of the stream, and look out for blockages and leaks. There have been cases of doors like that. Have you ever been down a sewer before, either of you?"

They answered in the negative.

"You won't like it," he told them.

"I guess not," Conway smiled. "Could we get in this evening? Night of course won't make any difference down there."

"None whatever, but there is plenty of daylight left yet," the engineer replied. "As a matter of fact, there is a shift goes on duty at six o'clock. It is nearly five now. If I drive you over, we'll probably catch the foreman of the shift before he goes down. Here is where the tool house for that section is located," he indicated a spot about half a mile from Canton Street. "We'll make for there. By the way, I guess from what you said just now that you want your operations kept dark from everybody, including the men of the shift. So I will instruct the foreman to take you himself to below manhole No. L2035 . . . that's this one north-west of Canton

Street . . and leave you there. That foreman, however . . Smith's his name . . is a dependable fellow. You can rely on him absolutely if you want to take him into your confidence."

"Fine," Spink said.

"All right, then. Suppose we start."

It was a little before six o'clock when they reached the tool warehouse. The shift had already descended into the regions below, but the foreman was still above ground. Carruthers quickly gave him his instructions. Then he left them. The foreman produced for them sewer men's rubbers, oilskins and sou'westers, pikes and lanterns. They also picked up an engineer's measuring tape. Thus suitably garbed and equipped, they entered the manhole and descended a narrow shaft a distance of some forty feet by means of a vertical ladder before they finally stood on the sidewalk of the sewer, a narrow pathway two feet wide.

"Not a very pleasant job you're on," Smith commented as he joined them below, "but all sorts of people come down here at times, besides architects and engineers. We've had bishops, and even the Prince of Wales. He got a great kick out of piking rats. From what Mr. Carruthers said, I take it you're tecs, eh? It's no business of mine, but . . ."

Carruthers had said he could be trusted, and there was no object in trying to work beyond Smith's knowledge, for there was nothing to stop him from watching them. And they might obtain more willing assistance from him by giving him their confidence. So Spink told him almost as much as he had told the engineer.

"Them Chinks is dirty enough for anything," Smith then commented, "but I guess you won't find anything down here. And they couldn't have flung the body down a manhole, for it would have lodged at the bottom of the shaft. They'd have to carry it down, or go down after it and push it into the stream, and that'd leave the manhole open too long, besides the danger of some shift catching them. These rats sometimes go right out into the river, so they might have got at the body out there. —But come on! I'll put you beneath Canton Street. Know it as well as if I was walking upstairs in the daylight. You want to keep one eye on the rats all the time. There ain't many along here, but what there are are damned big, and mighty vicious. If you jab at them quick with your pikes they'll mostly be in the stream before you can touch them."

He walked along the slimy footwalk in front of them, here and there stabbing at a rat as large as a full-grown hedgehog. As he had warned them, they looked vicious enough, with their little, blinking, piggy eyes, and showing snarling teeth at their approach. But they were afraid of a pike, and dived into the stream before the point reached them.

"Nice little animals!" Smith said, jokingly, as he jabbed savagely at a particularly vicious-looking rodent. "That fellow was an old man. Give me the women for pets. But we haven't started making pets of them yet, like some of the fellers did in the trenches. But them rats was different. Not that these chaps ain't affectionate likewise. They love each other so much they're cannibals. Watch them go after

this one!" He had skewered a rat through the head with his pike, and, as he spoke, jerked the carcass into the stream. They did not see a rat for several minutes afterwards.

"Take care you don't slip!" he called back to them once, as they were traversing a very slippery bridge over the junction of a tributary. He added: "The rats may like it in there, but up here's bad enough for a human being."

They agreed with him, though it was not so bad as they had expected. The main odor they could detect was chlorine.

Presently, after it seemed they had crept along that narrow footway for miles, Smith stopped at the base of a shaft.

"This is the L2035 manhole," he said. "We're at the northwest end of Canton Street. There's another bridge a hundred yards along, and the next manhole, almost at the other end of Canton Street, is a quarter of a mile from here. The side we're on is nearest the street. If you want to work the other side after you've done this a piece, you have to go to one of the manholes, for that's the only place where there's a bridge across the main. I'm going back to that last branch we crossed over. The gang's up there doing some repairs. If you want me, go back to the bridge and shout straight up the tunnel. I'll hear you. Sound carries a long way down here when it's direct. Don't slip, and mind the rats! So long!"

What Smith had said with regard to the distance between manholes they had already observed from the blue prints. By their estimation, Li's house would be almost halfway between the manholes. They took the foreman's estimate

of a hundred yards to the next tributary on their side, and then measured eighty yards from the bridge to obtain a suitable point at which to start working.

From the footwalk on which they stood to where the roof of the sewer began to arch was a height of approximately six feet. The wall was perfectly plane, but sloped inwards gradually from bottom to top, which fact had added to the awkwardness of their progress along the walk. They began tapping carefully along this almost vertical portion of the wall, sounding for the hollow space behind a secret door, though it is doubtful if they could have discerned this behind the solid masonry. They had proceeded not more than two or three yards when they were compelled to change their method. Attracted, rather than scared, by the light of the lamps, the rats were accumulating about them in serious numbers. It was necessary for one of them to give all his attention to the rodents while the other worked, until Spink thought to test out what the foreman had demonstrated about their cannibalism. After that they were free from the vermin most of the time.


They had covered some sixty yards without meeting with any success when Spink remarked: "According to those blue prints, we must have covered the area under Li's house. Logically, of course, the side nearest the street should be the correct one, but don't you think we should try the other side before we go any farther?"

"Maybe you're right," Conway acquiesced. "If you like I will go back to the bridge and come opposite here while you wait. Then, if you come round too, it will save us

the necessity of re-measuring. We can work backwards from this point."

Fifteen minutes after they started working on the opposite wall Conway discovered a crack in the masonry into which he could insert the blade of a knife. Moreover, the crack, which was a joint in the masonry, extended from top to bottom of the wall, and, from the movements possible with the knife blade when it was inserted, it was evident that the inside edges were beveled. Another fact made their discovery of the door a certainty. As Spink applied a torch to the crack, with his eye glued to it in an effort to see through, a gust of air, faint but perceptible, brushed his face. Undoubtedly beyond there was a passage, the air forced through the crack caused by the opening and closing of another door at the other end of it!

For a minute or two they searched in feverish excitement for a means of opening this door, but it seemed there was nothing for it but to roll the solid block of masonry aside.

 That was a matter they were just beginning to contemplate when they saw a man approaching with a light along the footwalk of the sewer. Instead, of being the foreman, as they half expected, it was the Assistant Engineer, Caruthers.

"Hullo!" he said, as he joined them. "Thought I would come along to see how you were progressing. Have you found anything?"

Briefly, they told him.

"It sounds incredible, but perhaps you are right," was his comment when he had listened to what they said. "Of

course, even if it were hinged, the slope at the top would do away with the need of fastening, and at the same time would throw all the weight on this side. Have you tried to move it?"

"We were about to do that when we saw you coming," Conway told him. "What we had principally in our minds was to get assistance from your foreman Smith, and perhaps some of his gang. It looks an untouchable proposition to just two of us. That slab must weigh nearly half a ton."

"We'll try, anyhow," Carruthers said. "But for heaven's sake be careful, and mind your feet. It's as slippery as hell!"

He put his shoulder to the slab, and Spink and Conway used their pikes as levers. In spite of the engineer's injunction, they all three nearly fell . . . not because of the slippery sidewalk, but from the ease with which the door gave before them. The solid masonry of the sewer had been replaced by a slab of concrete not more than three inches thick!

"Can you beat that?" Carruthers exclaimed, as they continued to push the slab back until the aperture was fully opened before them. "The person who constructed that was a first-class engineer. But for you folks it wouldn't have been discovered in a century. Even had the sewer flooded, the pressure of the water might have forced it back, but it would have dropped again with the receding waters."

"And here is the means of keeping it open, if necessary," Spink ejaculated, indicating a pulley attachment on the inside of the improvised door. "One man alone could operate it from the inside."

Beyond was a narrow passage. They allowed the door to close, steadying it with the rope round the pulley. The passage, which they followed, was damp and musty, but they were glad to be away from the noisome atmosphere and denizens of the sewer. At the end of several yards they came to a rough-hewn flight of steps. As they ascended these — they counted forty in all — the engineer, who was leading, stopped suddenly and pointed. On several of the steps, in the illumination of the lamps, they could distinguish bloodstains, apparently both new and old!

"The way Kwong Heisu's body was brought down, and God knows whose else besides," Spink whispered. "Our lives won't be worth anything if we are caught. If you take my advice, Mr. Carruthers, you'll go back and leave us to it. There is no need for you to run into danger like that."

"Nothing doing," Carruthers said, without a tremor in his voice. "If you don't mind, I'll see this thing through with you. Has either of you two guns?"

"I have," they both answered together. "Here is one of mine," Spink added. He was nearest to Carruthers. "Have you a torch?"

"I always carry one in the sewers," the engineer answered. "There's always danger of a lamp going out, or being lost."

"Good. We'll use a torch now. These lamps shed too wide a beam of light."

They extinguished the lamps, and ascended the remainder of the steps with the aid of a torch. At the top was a narrow passage running straight ahead of them. They had covered

about twenty yards of this when they came to a point where two other passages branched off, one on either side, at angles of 120 degrees to the tunnel ahead.

They passed these passages and halted for a moment in the darkness, having switched off the torch. In the distance, along the way to their left, they heard the closing of a door, while another faint breath of air brushed their faces. For several minutes they listened intently, anticipating the sound of footsteps, though none came. No further sound broke the silence.

It was Carruthers who spoke first. "We have come at right angles to the sewer," he said, just loud enough for his companions to hear. "Which way do we go now? One of these side tunnels . . . both of them, in fact . . . must lead back to the houses on the east side of Canton Street."

"The one straight ahead would lead to the river?" Spink queried.

"I should imagine so," the engineer answered.

"Then we had better try that first. It may lead to another exit which can be used in an emergency. And a direct route is the safest guide here. We may be in the network of tunnels that are supposed to undermine Limehouse, and if we venture along either of the others, especially in practical darkness, we may find ourselves lost in a maze of them."

It was Conway who was speaking. Spink added to that: "The one to the left is probably the one leading to Li Ying Hua's, and even that may not be direct. As Conway says, it will lessen our danger if we try to discover an emergency exit first."

Carruthers flashed his torch for a moment or two along the straight tunnel. They could not see the end of it, but the light revealed that for a certain distance at least the path was free from pitfalls and obstacles. Extinguishing it again, they felt their way along the walls to a point as far as they estimated the light had reached.

Before they arrived there, they halted again suddenly. Again a door had opened somewhere behind, and again the breath of air fanned them.

"Must be the door that opened while you were in the sewer," Carruthers whispered. "I wonder what causes that draught."

"Hard to say," Spink whispered back. "Kind of uncanny, isn't it, this opening and closing of doors down here? Listen!"

From somewhere, though it was difficult to determine the exact direction, they heard the sound of padded footsteps, shuffling . . . almost running. They sounded even more eerie in the blackness of the tunnel than the closing doors. More than that, the footsteps were coming nearer.

"I'll be shooting something before I know where I am," Carruthers remarked, with the slightest trace of excitement in his voice. "If he comes this way we'll have to. If he goes down the steps he will probably see our damp rubber prints."

"Hush!"

The shuffling footsteps seemed to be right on them. They crouched against the wall, guns ready against any emergency. A sudden beam of light flashed across the intersection of the

passages behind them, but turned away again immediately. The person in the maze besides themselves had also been using a torch. Was he now approaching them in the darkness? If so, he was approaching them unconsciously, for the light had not come anywhere near them.

The footsteps began to recede. Coming along the passage to the left, he must have turned at another junction. Before they had time to appreciate their relief, again the closing of a door.

"Hell!" Conway ejaculated softly, after another minute of unbroken silence. "It's fortunate we didn't start along there!"

"They must make habitual use of these tunnels," was Spink's comment.

"Yes," said Carruthers, "and if there are no more blood-stains leading to a particular door, it would take more than a Sherlock Holmes to discover from where the body of that Chinaman was carried to the top of the sewer steps."

"Let's get on," Spink said. "It should be safe to flash a torch once more."

The light, directed straight ahead, showed the termination of the passage they were in.

"That's funny. It doesn't look like a door," Conway remarked, as they kept the light on it.

"Yet there must be one somewhere," Spink replied.

"There would be no object, I should think, in building a cul-de-sac down here. And there are no more branches leading from this tunnel."

"Might be a blind tunnel at that," Carruthers returned. "If so, and intended for a trap, it would be one from which there was no escape. The sooner we find out the better."

"We won't use the light more than we have to," Spink said, and Carruthers, who was using his torch, switched it off again.

As they approached, if there was a door, they half expected a tiny beam of light at least to cut the opaque darkness. But there was nothing. It was useless to strain their eyes for what did not exist. There was greater need to keep every other faculty alert.

Once more Carruthers flashed the torch for an instant. They were still twenty paces from the end, having covered not more than half the distance they had thought. But the light relieved their anxiety in one respect. Before them was undoubtedly a door of wood!

In a few more seconds they had reached it, but, pushing against it, at first gently and then more firmly, they found it perfectly rigid. Neither, in another instant of light, could they discern a handle by means of which the fastening could be turned.

Diligent search, however, finally revealed a hidden spring under a veneer in the jamb. As Carruthers pushed on it in feeling down the jamb, the door commenced to open. Still there was no light from the other side. And the door only opened far enough for one person to get through at a time, while there was just space enough, as he ascertained by feeling, for such a person to stand aside, to close the door before passing by on the other side.

Momentarily he flashed the light on the location of the hidden spring. "I'll go first," he said. "You will have to follow one at a time. Don't lose the position of the spring!"

The door closed behind him. They heard him brush by on the far side. Spink opened the door and followed, being followed in turn by Conway, who, leaving the door partly open, passed his hand down the jamb until he felt the protruding catch. Touching the jamb on the other side, the catch disappeared. The door could be opened in the same manner from both sides. Communicating this fact to his companions, he closed the door.

On either side of them they could feel wood. Evidently they were in a passage in a building. But where? The only possible answer, from the distance they had covered, was that they were in a secret passage in one of the warehouses along the wharf. Also, the fact that they could nowhere discern the faintest chink of light suggested that once again they could safely make use of the torch. Flashing it, they saw they were actually in a wooden passage, and that the only exit from it was apparently a trap in the floor!

"This is getting too damned mysterious," Carruthers breathed. "If all the entrances to this maze are as carefully concealed, it is no wonder the existence of the tunnels has never been discovered. If you hadn't come purposely looking for it, it wouldn't . . ."

He stopped abruptly. There was a movement on the other side of the partition towards the river. This movement resolved into the scampering of tiny feet.

"Another rat!" was Spink's disgusted comment. "What shall we do? Try the hole in the floor?"

It seemed the only thing to do. From the top there was no attempt at disguising what the trap was. It lifted easily, but still the same opaque darkness. Feeling down, Spink's hand encountered nothing. There was a suggestion, in the highly-strung state of his mind, of an immensity of space below.

After a moment of hesitation, they followed the principle that had guided them before. Where no light could be seen, it was comparatively safe to introduce one. What the flash revealed was almost a shock to Spink's nerves . . not from the actual depth to which they might have fallen, but because the immensity of space he had imagined was less than a drop of four feet. Below them was a kind of shelf, and below that again was the floor of a cellar of some description.

Still following the same cautious tactics, they found the cellar quite spacious, but obstructed by empty bales of various descriptions. Evidently they had reached one climax of their incursion. Picking their way through the scattered merchandise bales, they observed several things. In two places at least were electric light sockets with bulbs. They tried one, but it did not light. Apparently it was switched off upstairs. On the opposite side to that at which they had entered, they suddenly encountered light from outside coming through a break, barely perceptible, in the heavy shutters barring the only window in the cellar. As they listened at this window, they could hear the lapping of water, seemingly close outside.

That was as far as they dared go just yet. There were steps leading to the regions above their heads, and all was silent; but it would not be safe to risk ascending. Though they could hear nothing, there might be people in the warehouse somewhere . . . warehousemen and clerks, Chinese doubtless, from the marks on the bales, nothing being recorded in English except the addresses. Those addresses, however, showed plainly that they were at least on the right track, for Li Ying Hua's name appeared in many of them. There was but one means of ascertaining their exact location, and that was the window. They opened the shutters slightly, and peered through.

They were almost on a level with the river, from which nothing but a narrow ledge of wharf separated them.

"They could have dropped the body just as easily into the water here, and the current would have taken it away," Spink remarked.

"I see their idea," Carruthers replied. "It is a ghastly thought, but they were depending on the rats to complete their dastardly work. But, for some reason or another, the rats are sometimes entirely absent from different sections of the sewers. For their purpose they chose an unfortunate season."

From the window they could see boats of various descriptions on the river, besides landmarks which it would be easy to pick up again. There was no means of seeing the houses at the back of the warehouse in Canton Street. Neither could they have recognized Li Ying Hua's house had that been possible.

Getting back again into the tunnel was a little more difficult than they had imagined it would be. The shelf they had encountered beneath the trap door extended the whole length of the cellar, and the trap itself was more carefully constructed than they had thought from the top. Its presence unsuspected, it would never have been observed, the edges fitting so perfectly with the woodwork of the ceiling. They found it by testing, however, and soon stood in the passage above, using a torch until they reached the door leading into the tunnel.

It was fortunate they extinguished it there. Barely were they on the other side of the door when they saw again another light crossing the tunnel at the junction with the others. Breathlessly they watched, Spink with his hand ready on the secret spring in case the light should turn their way; but it went straight on. Behind the light, they could but dimly discern the figure of the person carrying it. Yet what they did see, had they not been half expecting it, would have made their hair stand on end. It was a ghostly figure shrouded with a flowing Chinese mask . . . none other than the man they knew only as The Scorpion, the impersonator of Kwong Heisu!

The impulse of each was to restrain the others from rushing forward. The same thought occurred to all three. Hearing their steps in pursuit, the murderer could have lost them entirely in the maze of tunnels, perhaps trapping them himself. But they knew they had discovered one fact which might help them later. There were several ends to his secret lair, but one of them was undoubtedly the house of Li Ying Hua!

THE SCORPION

CHAPTER XVIII

SPINK REMOVES NORTON TO A PLACE OF SAFETY



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WHEN they stood once more within the comparative safety of the sewer, Carruthers mopped his brow. "Heavens!" he ejaculated. "That masked fellow gave me the creeps. Some climax that! Who the devil was he?"

"He's the man . . . or one of them . . . that we are after," Spink returned. "But we couldn't have got him then. More probably he would have got us. That is the man who was seen in Epping Forest . . . the man who presumes to be a masked Chinaman. Who he actually is we can't tell you . . . yet. At present we only know him by the name we have given him . . . *The Scorpion*. We told you, Mr. Carruthers, that we were looking for the way that Chinaman, picked up at Gravesend, got into the sewer, but we did not tell you everything. Here is the rest of it. That man we have just seen not only murdered the Chinaman, who has been identified as Kwong Heisu . . . the supposed murderer of Richard Anthony and Charles Brimmer . . . but he took the Chinaman's identity and committed those murders himself, after ridding himself of the real Kwong Heisu. Moreover; we are practically certain that he is an Englishman, or one

who speaks the English language fluently. If ever there was a devil in human form, The Scorpion is that one!"

"It should be easy enough to get him now," Carruthers said. He had regained his composure, and spoke calmly. "We have the entrance to their rabbit warren. With Scotland Yard behind you, and a man posted in every one of the passages that can be found . . ."

"You forget that everyone of those passages has possibly two different outlets, if not more, through the houses in Canton Street or elsewhere," Conway reminded him.

"That would mean you would have to make sure The Scorpion was actually in the tunnels before the men were posted, wouldn't it?"

"Exactly. And we don't want to have to call in the police until we are absolutely in a position to make an arrest."

"I thought you said you had full authority from Scotland Yard?" Carruthers queried.

"I have," Spink answered. "Actually, however, we are working independently of Scotland Yard, being employed by friends of the two murdered men."

"I see," the engineer remarked.

"Besides, there's an old saying that applies here with good force," Spink went on.

"What's that?"

" 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'."

"I get you," Carruthers smiled. Then he added: "But when I make my report about this door, the Commissioner is practically certain to take the matter to Scotland Yard."

There is the question of tampering with Public Works which will have to be investigated."

"Listen, Mr. Carruthers," Spink said to him. "You didn't come to the sewer with us officially, did you?"

"Well, no; not exactly. What then?"

"Could this not be kept quiet for a day or two?"

Carruthers considered a moment, then he said: "I will agree to that on one condition."

"What is that?"

"That you let me join you. I admit that I felt a trifle nervous, but that is because I am unaccustomed to this sort of thing. You may find an extra man useful."

"We may be able to finish what we want to do tonight," Spink said.

"In that case I couldn't possibly hand in my report in time to interfere," the engineer replied. "About my joining you, then?"

"We can certainly do with an extra man, or even with two," Spink said. "If you are willing to take the risk . . ."

"Most assuredly," Carruthers replied, pleased at the concession. "And with regard to the second man . . . I have already told you Smith is a good fellow; quite reliable, in fact. How would it be if you left him here, inside the sewer, to watch this unauthorized door, and to prevent anyone from escaping through it?"

"Splendid," Spink said. "You two can fix it up with him after I have gone. I am intending to try to meet The Scorpion inside Li Ying Hua's."

"That's suicide!" Conway expostulated.

"A risk, undoubtedly," Spink returned. "A big risk at that. But I have an idea I can overcome it."

"If not, we'll be here to receive the remains," his partner was very dissatisfied with the arrangement.

"We know The Scorpion is in the tunnels. We have seen him," Carruthers reasoned. "Why cannot we try to catch him now? He was alone when we saw him."

"We know he *was* in the tunnels," Spink corrected that statement. "It may be necessary to scare him back into them."

"That argument is not very sound," Conway retorted. "He doesn't know that we have seen him. If the tunnels represent his usual method of getting into Li's . . ."


"They may and they may not," Spink replied, without giving him time to finish. "To save time, let me give you the main arguments from my point of view. My chief objection to trapping him as you suggest is this. The mere fact that he sports a Chinese mask is not sufficient to connect him with the murders. The Chinese in Limehouse may have secret societies . . . lodges, or something . . . among themselves, possibly criminal at the bottom, and wearing a mask may be part of the regalia. Indeed, that may be what we have seen now, although of course I don't think so . . . a lone Chinaman proceeding to his lodge. Further, I don't suppose anyone, not even Pringle or Beauchamp, could swear to the actual mask. Therefore, we have got to trap him in a position where he can be absolutely identified as the user of the scorpions. He doesn't know, as you say, that we have discovered his lair. If I am trapped and made

prisoner, I feel confident that they will use every means possible to extract from me certain information, which I shall profess to have, before they put me out of mess."

"But you would never get out again alive, whether you gave him the information or not," Conway argued.

"Without your assistance I don't suppose I would," Spink returned quietly. "With your assistance, I fully expect to. This is what I want you to do. Come back here, say at ten o'clock. That will be about the time when I shall get to Li's. Don't go beyond the top of the steps, in case you encounter someone to give the alarm in one of the passages. If Li or The Scorpion bring me in this direction, to give me a taste of the sewer, do what you like with them. I shall be beyond worrying. On the other hand, the warehouse cellar, from what we have seen of it, suggests itself as a very convenient prison if their purpose is to keep me alive, as I am gambling it will be. Besides, if there are any more of the scorpions anywhere, I think that is the logical place for them.

"If I am carried, or taken by force, to the warehouse, assume that I am alive, but don't make any immediate attempt at rescue. There may be traps and pitfalls we have not discovered, and you might not get very far once they are alarmed. Come there after they have returned. If possible, discover the exact location of the door leading from the tunnels into Li's, in case I may not be able to discern it for myself. By the time you come to me in the warehouse, I hope to have enough evidence to convict them. Of course," he ended grimly, "if they bring me in this direction, you



will have all the evidence you want yourselves. Now let's get above ground. A breath of fresh air won't do any of us any harm. It will be time enough to instruct Smith when you come down again. He might not talk to any of the gang working under him in the meantime, but I don't want to take any unnecessary risk of leakage through oversight or carelessness."

When he left them in the tool warehouse, Spink did not proceed directly to his own home. There was another problem to which it was urgent to find a solution. That problem concerned Norton; or rather how to cover him during what might resolve itself into a long absence on his part. And reasoning along the following lines made the problem still more urgent.

In the first place, the tone of the typewritten letter Norton had received, intimidating to an extreme degree, was expected to inspire its recipient with an unconquerable fear. To that fear there was but one plausible termination. Norton had already suggested it to him. After witnessing the horrible method employed in the murder of his friends, and the relentless pursuit demonstrated in the tracking of Beauchamp from Chancery Lane to Epping Forest, to save his own life Norton was ready to give up the diamond, had it been in his possession, or had the secret combination of the safe deposit box been known to him. And he had expected him, Spink, to be the bearer of his message to the house of Li Ying Hua.

Putting himself in The Scorpion's place, Spink realized that such a solution must have passed through the arch-crim-

inal's mind. There could be no other person than himself employed as the messenger, for he alone knew where The Scorpion was to be found. He alone — apart from Inspector Dalglish, who would not understand its significance — had seen the typewriter which had been purposely left for him to see.

He would be the person expected to seek The Scorpion, believing him to be Kwong Heisu. And there were other facts which one might suppose The Scorpion had considered. Following Beauchamp from Chancery Lane, and observing that instead of making for his own home he hit for the open country, it must have occurred to him that Beauchamp was either making off with the diamond, or had placed it in security for himself when he chose to return for it. Probably he had trailed him to where he lay unconscious in the ditch, and, by searching him, had been forced to the conclusion that he was not carrying the 'Light of Buddha' away. Then why, in his process of elimination, had he not murdered him there? The answer to that was perfectly obvious. To kill him might be for ever to destroy the secret of the diamond's new hiding-place. As Beauchamp had failed in his attempt to get away, it was possible that he had later confided that secret to Norton. Again there was but one person through whom that could have been done . . himself, Spink. That would mean, of course, that Spink knew the secret too, and was again The Scorpion's reason for wishing to get him into his hands.

On the other hand, if Beauchamp had still retained that information for himself, and The Scorpion knew that he

had gone to him, there must be some other move in the criminal's mind. Spink found himself studying the problem as he might a game of chess; a game in which The Scorpion had the distinct advantage of knowing his, Spink's, identity, while the latter was still playing blindfolded. Spink allowed himself a momentary grim smile as he thought that The Scorpion might have been watching him in Chancery Lane, while he himself was looking in vain for a Chinaman with scarred features.

It was necessary to anticipate every possible move by his opponent. If this last thought had occurred to The Scorpion, there was another obvious solution to his latest move. He knew that Spink was more or less giving Norton personal protection. Then why should he want to get him out of the way? Because by so doing he could not only rid himself of the detective, but have Norton at his own mercy as well, and, by eliminating him, leave only Beauchamp as the last possessor of the secret of the 'Light of Buddha'. Knowing that he would undoubtedly run very serious risk in placing himself within The Scorpion's reach, Spink had decided that the only thing to do to gain time was to lead The Scorpion to believe that he indeed shared the new secret with Beauchamp, if not Norton.

But that did not solve the problem of Norton. The Scorpion might still proceed with his elimination. Something would have to be done to protect him. Forming a plan quickly, Spink entered a telephone booth, and asked the operator for Norton's number. Immediately Norton spoke, Spink realized that, since the receipt of the letter

that afternoon, he had been existing in a condition of mortal fear. He tried to calm him, and failed so completely that he even wondered if Norton had got a clear conception of what he had told him.

An hour later, disguised, and attired as a clergyman of the Church of England, and carrying a club bag, Spink descended from an Elephant and Castle bus at London Bridge, and took the Underground to Ealing Broadway. He walked along High Street to the Lorraine Apartments, which gave a separate entrance to each block of four. In two hallways he examined superficially the cards of the residents, making a thorough scrutiny of the street as he did so. He saw no one who looked suspicious; neither could he discern any men he knew from Scotland Yard. After that he went boldly to Norton's door and rang the bell.

"The Rev. Mr. Cunningham," he gave his name to Peters, after enquiring if Mr. Norton were within.

"Mr. Norton is expecting you, sir," Peters replied, admitting him, and conducting him to Norton's study.

Norton hardly waited for Peters to close the door before he ejaculated the question: "Spink?"

"Yes," Spink said tersely. "For heaven's sake pull yourself together, or you won't be able to do what I want!"

"You haven't found him?" Norton asked, falteringly.

"Not yet. And it may be necessary to work all night, so I want to get you to a place of safety first. We are of about the same build, so these clothes should fit you," Spink said, beginning to divest himself of the clerical garments, after stripping the moustaches and sideburns from his face.

"Get ready to put them on. I'll fix the rest of it for you afterwards. You will leave these apartments as the Rev. Mr. Cunningham, of Little Compton, and I shall accompany you as Samuel Norton. Get busy!"

"I'll never be able to carry it off," Norton stammered.

"Say, listen!" Spink was beginning to lose patience at his pusillanimity. "What did you do while the others were breaking into that temple?"

"I assisted them, of course," Norton answered, wondering.

"One wouldn't think so," Spink retorted unfeelingly. If necessary, he was prepared to bully him into something like a return of manhood. He added: "Here am I, with my life in my hands every minute of the day and night, trying to help you, while you haven't got guts enough to help yourself. I have a mind to quit right now."

"For God's sake, no!" Norton exclaimed. "I'll do anything you want me to."

"Get busy then. It is getting darker outside every minute, and that makes it easier."

"Where are we going?"

"To the Langham Hotel. You will spend the night there, engaging a single room, without bath, in the clergyman's name. The house detective there has worked with me before. I will arrange for him to keep a strict eye on your room."

"Are you afraid we shall be followed?"

"The most likely thing in the world. That is why I am assuming your identity. Whether it is Scotland Yard, or

anyone else, it will be Norton who will be followed, after I have deposited you at the Langham. In any case, you will be perfectly safe under Jessop's care. He is the house dick."

"What shall I tell Peters?"

"Nothing. In your name, I will give him a satisfactory explanation after we're away. I'll ring Jessop now."

He called the Langham, and asked for Jessop.

"Spink speaking," he said to the house detective. "Listen, Jessop, there's a reverend gentleman named Cunningham coming to engage a room. I'll be with him, in disguise, but you'll recognize him . . . moustache and sideburns . . . from the country. Make the elevator with us, and see that we get an empty one. How soon? About half an hour."

They left the apartment without Peters seeing them, and walked along the Broadway to the nearest Underground station. So far as Spink could ascertain, there was no one following them. But he thought it better to make sure, so they loitered in the subway until the moment of departure of an eastbound train. As the guard blew his whistle, Spink hustled Norton through the gate, which clanged behind them. He had already two tickets for Hammersmith in his pocket. He did not tell Norton their present destination.

At Hammersmith, he again waited until the train was on the point of leaving, then jumped from his seat as if he had suddenly remembered. Norton scrambled after him, and they alighted as the train was beginning to move. They were the last to leave the train, and Spink began to feel relieved. Inspector Dalgleish had apparently withdrawn

the Scotland Yard men, while The Scorpion was content to await the effects of the letter.

They took a taxi from Hammersmith to the Langham Hotel. As arranged, Jessop followed them into the elevator. As soon as the bell hop had disappeared he went into the room.

"This gentleman is afraid of being molested during the night," Spink told Jessop. "Keep a close tab on his room."

"If I am alive tomorrow, there's a hundred pounds in it for you," Norton intervened.

Jessop whistled. "Something really serious on hand?" he questioned Spink.

"Yes," Spink said. "The scorpion murders!"

Jessop whistled again. He said: "You're dead right it's serious then. This gentleman is . . . ?"

"Norton, one of the other partners. I can't look after him tonight."

"You can bet your life I will," Jessop said quickly. "I can do nicely with that hundred quid. If anyone gets a scorpion near him, I'll resign."

"He means that, too, so you are perfectly safe," Spink said to Norton after Jessop had left the room. "Here are some additional instructions which you had better follow to the letter. Go down to breakfast tomorrow morning when Jessop advises you. Stay in the lounge all day except for meals. There will be other people there all the time. You need not bother about hiding yourself, for, if we were followed, Scotland Yard knows already that the Rev. Mr. Cunningham is here. If you don't see me before tomorrow

evening, take an opportunity to tell Jessop that you are staying another night."

Leaving the hotel, Spink telephoned Peters from a call box, and, taking greater precaution than usual for throwing a follower off the scent, he went to his own home. As a matter of fact, his precautions were unnecessary. Scotland Yard, deeming a warning sufficient, had removed the watchers from Ealing Broadway. Further than that, from the time they returned with Inspector Dalglish from Gravesend, The Scorpion had paid no more heed to their movements, confident that his threatening letter would produce the desired result.





THE SCORPION

CHAPTER XIX

SPINK ENCOUNTERS THE SCORPION



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IT was nearly ten o'clock when Spink approached the house of Li Ying Hua. For several reasons he thought it wise to be disguised as he had originally planned, though he knew, once he came face to face with The Scorpion, his identity would be known. Chief among those reasons was the fact that night was a dangerous time for any respectable man to be prowling the streets of Limehouse, which then became the haunt of criminals and dope addicts. So well was he made up by his medical friend to resemble one of the latter that it was only by showing his badge to the policeman on beat nearest the quarter that he escaped being arrested as a man already too far under the influence of dope of some description. As such, too, he passed under the critical eyes of many purveyors of narcotics, though, except for an occasional salutation from some of them, he continued his way unaddressed. The dope peddlers, Chinese and White, were too cautious to make advances, the invitation of confidence underlying the tone of their salutation being sufficient indication to a narcotic addict accustomed to purchasing their wares. As they elicited no response from this apparent wastrel, they let him pass unmolested, merely

shrugging their shoulders, or spreading their hands behind his back.

In the restaurant section of Li's establishment were several Chinese, most of whom were eating dishes for which the proprietor's cook had established a reputation. Li himself approached before he had staggered many steps inside the door.

"Nice evening," he greeted him *sauvely*.

"Needs some *snow* to clear the fog," Spink spluttered, speaking in the vernacular of the dope peddlers.

"Too much snow, pletty soon fog," Li Ying Hua replied. He piloted Spink towards a table, adding: "You drink cup of coffee, hot . . . sleep little while. Pletty soon no fog, you betcha."

"To hell with your coffee!" Spink growled. But he subsided into a chair, nevertheless, and raised no further objections when Li approached him again with the coffee he had prescribed. Spink pulled a bill fold from his pocket, and extracted a ten-shilling Bradbury which he proffered in payment for the stimulant. Li's slits of eyes narrowed still more as he observed that the note he received was but one of several.

"P'laps you play little game of 'beat-the-Chinaman'?" he suggested softly.

"Where's the coke? I can pay for it," Spink grumbled.

"No can do," Li returned.

"Some joint this!" Spink growled. "I'll find a place where there is some." He made as if to stagger to his feet, but collapsed in the attempt.

Li Ying Hua was not minded to let him go so easily. Here was a sot who might easily be parted from his money, of which he appeared to have plenty.

"Play little game first," he said. "Me get some later."

"Make it snappy, then," Spink replied. "Made lots of easy money, so might as well get rid of some." This last remark he made because he fancied he could discern, from the rigidity of the Chinaman's features, that his chances of obtaining a narcotic, had he really required one, were very slight. He would never get beyond the room where he then was, to be turned out later into the street, when Li had relieved him of most of his cash. To remain in the house, he would have to take a desperate chance. Whether he could continue to conceal his identity was a different matter, but he would have to come out so far into the open again . . . sufficiently far to warrant an entry into those inner rooms of the establishment.

Li's eyes glowed. "You make easy money, eh?" he queried. "Where you get him?"

"Met a cove who gave me fifty quid to find a friend of his in Limehouse," Spink said carelessly. "Said this was the joint where he was likely to hang out. Bloke by the name of Kwong Something. I almost forgot to ask about him. Do you know any Kwongs?"

Without otherwise betraying any emotion, Li Ying Hua scrutinized him piercingly. But Spink's bloodshot eyes never batted beneath the searching almond eyes of the Chinaman as Li answered, speaking fluently, and dropping his pidgin English: "There are many houses of Kwong, with descend-

ants more numerous than the stars. It is like the name of Smith in this country."

"Bad as that, eh?" Spink returned, without much surprise. Then he began to fumble in his pockets. "Something else I forgot," he said, producing a scrap of paper. "The cove who wants to find him wrote his name on this paper. There's his own name and address, too." And he handed the paper to Li Ying Hua. "If you can find this Mr. Kwong for me, I'll slip you a couple of quid."

"Kwong Heisu!" Li murmured softly, as Spink recommenced turning the cards over slowly in a dopey manner. "Yes, I have heard of him. In China, he is a great High Priest . . . Very illustrious person. He came to visit me once, and perhaps I can find him, though it may take time."

"No rush," Spink said laconically. "The other cove seemed kind of anxious, but I've got lots of time to spend my fifty jimmy-o-goblins. Say," and he looked up with bleary enthusiasm, "how are chances of a pipe? It might help me to remember all I was supposed to tell him. Something about a rendezvous, or something. Hell if I can remember it straight."

"P'laps can do!" Li's only betrayal of his excitement was his momentary lapse into pidgin. "Come!"

Spink followed him upstairs.

"Wait!" Li Ying Hua then said, disappearing again.

He came back quickly followed by another Chinaman. He explained to Spink: "Too early yet for pipe. Too many people downstairs. Plesently lotsa time. You play

'nother game of solitaire. P'laps you beat the Chinaman Ho Ling. Make twenty-two pips, double your money."

He went away then, leaving Ho Ling to watch his manipulation of the game of solitaire.

"Hell!" Spink exclaimed to Ho Ling, after about fifteen minutes of dallying with the cards. "This game's too slow. I wish he'd hurry with that pipe. I'm too damned fidgety for words!"

Downstairs, Li Ying Hua had gone straight to the room which contained the typewriter, and the secret entrance to the tunnels. The Scorpion was there awaiting him . . . had been there all the evening in anticipation of a message from Norton, with the secret door on the latch ready for an emergency exit. Closing the other door behind him Li Ying Hua dropped instantly his bland suavity.

"Master," he said excitedly, "he falls into our hands!"

"Who?" the masked figure enquired.

"His disguise is good, but the eyes of the Son of the Moon are keen," Li answered vaguely, proud of his own discrimination. "He came as a drunken sot with a message, asking for a pipe."

"Quick! Out with it!" the other commanded. "Is it Spink?"

"The same, Master. If he had fooled me . . ."

"I would have known him," The Scorpion stated the fact quietly, without any show of boastfulness.

"Yes," Li pandered to him, "the Master is wise, and his eyes could penetrate any disguise. It was he who first

thought that Anthony would have the 'Light of Buddha', and then read the secret of its hiding-place."

The Scorpion was thinking, allowing Li to ramble on in his extravagant praises. Then he said: "Let him think for a little while that he is unrecognized. Give him a pipe to help his thought of security. Don't watch him too closely, or he may become suspicious. Just see that the pipe is once alight, and then leave him for a while, until you can get the house cleared. Mix the pill so that the effect, if he takes it at all, will be but mildly stupefying, just enough to make him easy in our hands. I want to get the information I seek without too much delay. Kwong Heisu has been found. The rats, confound them! did not disfigure the body at all. So we must get the diamond before the masked Chinaman has to disappear!"

"The Master is wise," Li replied, slipping from the room.

He went upstairs as Spink was becoming more urgent in his demands for a pipe. He showed him the pill he was rolling in his hands, after a cautious word of warning to Ho Ling. Settling Spink comfortably on one of the bunks, he lit the pipe for him, then withdrew where the detective could not see him.

For a few minutes Spink kept the pipe going with his suction and exhaust syringe. He did not dare use the instrument too long, in case Li Ying Hua or Ho Ling should return. But apparently the Chinamen were deceived by the wreaths of smoke which escaped from the curtains of the bunk. Spink did not know that the mixture Li had prepared was one to produce a greater volume of smoke than

opium alone would have done, it being his first experience as an opium smoker. Presently he hid the syringe, and laid the pipe aside, feigning a drugged sleep. So far his plan had appeared to work without a hitch, but he lay so that he could grasp the gun under his armpit in case of a surprise.

Soon he was aware that the curtains of the bunk had been pulled aside. Tensely he waited, not daring to open his eyes. He felt Li Ying Hua reach for him, but it was only to shake him by the shoulder to arouse him. Then it was that Spink first started to become suspicious. According to any theory of opium smoking he had heard, it would have been as easy to awaken the dead as a man under the first effect of the drug.

For that reason he did not dally too long with his resistance, but opened his eyes drowsily. He knew he did not need to feign much with them. They were smarting almost beyond endurance from the injection his medical friend had used to make them bleary.

"Come!" Li Ying Hua said softly. "I have found the great High Priest of Buddha of the Scorpions. He awaits you."

"Let him wait!" Spink mumbled. "How long have I slept?"

"Not very long. You didn't finish all the pipe."

"Then give it to me! Let me finish it!"

"Presently. You cannot keep such an illustrious one waiting. He is already impatient with delay."

Spink took a frantic tug at the pipe lying beside him. Luckily, as he hoped, it was out.

"No light till you get back," Li said severely.

Grumbling, Spink struggled from the bunk, and, with every faculty alert, followed Li downstairs. At last he was to be in the presence of the unknown murderer. If his disguise had really held good, it was necessary to exercise every caution. Yet, his suspicions already aroused by the phenomenon of his awakening, he found it difficult to stifle an unc customary tremor of fear. One false move, and his life would not be worth a moment's purchase.

He shrank backwards in well-feigned alarm as he confronted a figure draped in a flowing mask, through a gauzy portion of which the eyes of the wearer were dimly visible.

"God!" he stammered. "What's the idea of trying to scare a bloke like this? Let me get out!"

"You have nothing to fear," came a muffled voice from behind the mask. "My features are covered, for no mortal can look on the face of Kwong Heisu, High Priest of Buddha of the Scorpions."

"Hell, but you scared me!" Spink exclaimed again. "The other cove never said anything about the Klu Klux Klan."

"Your message from Mr. Norton!" The Scorpion said tersely.

"I'll be lucky if I haven't forgotten it now," Spink faltered. He hesitated before adding: "I've got it. He said he would be waiting in the doorway of some joint you know in Chancery Lane at 3 o'clock tomorrow afternoon. He said he would be protected, but only in case of violence. Believe me, I don't know what he meant, but that's it. He gave me fifty quid to bring the message."

"Is that all?"

"Honest to God! Now let me out of here, and give me a shot of morph or something, or I'll think I'm crazy!"

There was the movement of a hand beneath the folds of the mask . . . a gesture pointing from Li Ying Hua to the door. Evidently it was a sign of dismissal, and for a moment Spink thought his suspicions must have been unfounded, and he be allowed to leave that room alive and unhindered. What if Li should conduct him to the door opening to the Street? He would not have gained any information beyond what he already knew. For a moment the thought flashed through his brain that The Scorpion, in his confidence of security, would have the temerity to rise to the bait he had tentatively offered as Norton's word . . . to be dismissed immediately as utterly inconceivable. A criminal of his intelligence would scarcely walk into a trap like that. For an instant again Spink thought of drawing his guns. There was a chance that he might get both The Scorpion and Li, whose hands were innocently unarmed. That thought was dismissed again as quickly. He might get them both, but could he discover the secret door into the tunnels before others should come? He realized that the chance of that was too remote to contemplate. He would then never get out of the house alive. No, there was nothing to do but risk Li's taking him again upstairs, and leaving him there with the pipe.

That prospect was again remarkably shortlived. He had barely taken two steps towards the door which Li held open in mock obsequiousness, stepping in front of the Chinaman

he did so, when one word . . a command . . was hissed behind him.

"Wait!"

At the same moment he realized, too, that Li Ying Hua was a past master in the art of dexterity. The Chinaman's hands had been devoid of weapons before; now Spink knew that one of them held a knife, and that the point of that knife was sticking into his back between the shoulders!

Li had seized his left wrist in a vice-like grip with his disengaged hand, and one glance at the grinning, devilish face over his shoulder told him what mercy he could expect from the Chinaman. In it he read little hope of the imprisonment he had anticipated should his identity become known. If he was to act, it would have to be quickly. Fortunately for that moment he had trained himself to act quickly, and the pressure of Li's hand on his wrist gave him a momentary opportunity. Not for nothing had he studied the holds and releases of jiu-jitsu. A quick lunge downwards over his wrist, a backward sweep of his left heel, and the Chinaman's head came into violent contact simultaneously with the floor and the butt of Spink's gun!

Like a flash Spink turned on the masked figure of The Scorpion. If he could get him with the butt too, the noise of the struggle might not have been heard without. As he turned, he observed that man's hands were now uncovered from the mask, and, though gloved, were apparently empty. With a feeling of exultation Spink lunged, but halted involuntarily halfway. One of the gloved hands had

opened, and a shining black creature, like a miniature lobster, came hurtling towards Spink's face!

With the instinct of self-preservation against the venomous creature, whose ominous portent he knew only too well, Spink was momentarily taken off his guard as he raised his hands to ward his face from it. That was the opportunity for which The Scorpion was watching. With a spring like a panther he was out of his chair, and before Spink could recover his balance, he found his arms held to his sides in a grip of iron.

He tried to struggle, but it was of no use. The other Chinaman who had been watching him upstairs, Ho Ling, entered swiftly and noiselessly. Between them, in a minute or two, they had the detective on the ground, his hands and feet tied. At a sign from The Scorpion, after Spink had been dispossessed of his weapons, Ho Ling withdrew, dragging the unconscious Li Ying Hua with him, and closing the door.

Panting slightly with the exertion he had expended, the masked criminal stood over his victim.

"Now, Mr. Spink," he said, "we have finished with farce. Let me have the true reason for your welcome visit!"

With difficulty, though his wits were keen in what he knew must now be an effort to gain time, Spink could hardly control a start, not so much at the direct imputation of the words, but at something in the speaker's voice, still muffled by the mask. There was a peculiar intonation he thought he recognized, something which might be a clue to the real identity of The Scorpion. For a while afterwards, he hardly

caught that peculiarity again, for when The Scorpion spoke the voice was different. In spite of the imminent danger he was in, Spink thought for a while that his first impression was a trick of the imagination, yet he strained his eyes seeking to peer behind that protecting strip of muslin, which, like the curtain to a window, obscured from outside while it gave free vision to the eyes behind it.

"It seems you know that already, you devil!" he said. "There on the table is the typewriter on which your threatening letter was written to Norton. I know it was your purpose that I should see it before, so as to know where to come. I also understand your intention that I should come. It was either me or Norton."

"Exactly," The Scorpion told him. "You for preference."

"Why?"

"I can get Norton any time. You were a different proposition."

"What do you expect to get from me?"

"It doesn't matter if I get nothing," The Scorpion said carelessly. "You see, my friend, I have got you. Everything depended on that. Surely your intelligence will tell you why. However, if you are wise, you will give me the information I want, and save me further trouble."

"You are sure I know what you want?" Spink fenced with him.

"Absolutely. Since you started interesting yourself — for the sum of £10,000, I believe — in my quest for the 'Light of Buddha', as far as was necessary I have had an

exact tab kept on your movements. Let me tell you something to convince you. Every minute of the day you hawked your wares so realistically on the kerb of Chancery Lane you were watched, nothing escaping observation . . . not even the showing of your badge to a too obtrusive policeman. You, of course, looking for the unfortunate Kwong Heisu, would not observe my entering and leaving the safety deposit vault — for I pride myself that my skill at disguise is equal to your own — when I ascertained that the diamond had been removed from Box 207. I speak of Kwong Heisu as unfortunate, because you know he is dead. I believe that you, in company with Inspector Dalgleish of Scotland Yard and Norton, went to Gravesend to identify his remains. He was in my way. I removed him, after receiving from him the fact of the existence of the 'Light of Buddha' and the names of its then possessors, and the method by which he proposed dealing with them. That method, shall we say, was too picturesque for me to drop?

"Going back to Chancery Lane, Beauchamp was ahead of me. Assisted probably by your valuable imagination, he thought of a means of getting the diamond before that same thought came to me. I know that Beauchamp didn't carry the diamond away with him. Neither did he lose it in the ditch where he was found, after his desperate effort to elude me. It was that discovery that led me to understand the import of your hasty journey to the Chelmsford County Hospital, Scotland Yard having prohibited Norton from making the journey himself. To make doubly sure, I learned that Beauchamp, under the name of James Reynolds, opened Box

205 in the same deposit vault. My assumption is that he transferred the diamond to it. What I do not assume, but know, is that you conveyed the combination of that box from Beauchamp to Norton. You have the opportunity of telling me now what that combination is."

Spink listened to this calm recital of his own activities without betraying any emotion, though he had been overawed by the tremendous possibilities that recital, following that peculiarity of the voice he had once or twice noticed, conjured up. That recital also gave him time to think of other things, even to the extent that he allowed himself to smile before the other had finished. Then he said, ironically: "You would do better to rely on assumption rather than knowledge for the last part of your unique statement, clever though you are."

"What do you mean?" The Scorpion demanded.

"You are correct in thinking that I obtained the combination of the new box from Beauchamp; you are wrong in believing that I conveyed it to Norton," Spink answered. "That gentleman, like yourself, knows the number of the box; but that is as far as his knowledge goes."

"Why . . ?" The Scorpion began.

Spink interrupted him, as if in continuation of his previous sentence: "Behold, trussed up before you, and temporarily at your mercy, a very potential criminal . . one you have still got to reckon with if you would obtain possession of the diamond before Beauchamp is discharged from the hospital! I have the number of that combination. You can get it only on one condition."

Though he could not see his face, Spink knew by The Scorpion's gesture that his confident manner had convinced him beyond his expectations. He read in that gesture that the respite for which he was fighting would be his, as the other asked again, this time less confidently: "What do you mean?"

Spink answered him: "Unlike your *unfortunate* victim, Kwong Heisu, who sought the 'Light of Buddha' for his principles of religion, you are seeking it for its intrinsic value. That value is close upon half a million. My price on that combination is one hundred thousand."

The Scorpion laughed contemptuously, doubting now the veracity of Spink's statement. "So," he said. "Tell me this, my friend, if your purpose was to obtain the diamond, why didn't you do so while you had the chance?"

"Because," Spink told him without hesitation, "the risk was too great while you were still seeking it. You saw my appreciation of a scorpion just now."

"Your purpose in coming here?" the other demanded viciously.

"Is an illustration of ~~how~~ the bud of criminal instinct may burst suddenly into flower," Spink answered enigmatically. "You see," he added, "the prospect of half a million stirring awakened in me criminal instincts I hadn't dreamed of possessing."

"Your purpose?" The Scorpion thundered.

"What do you suppose?" Spink's voice was quiet, but caustic. "To get you if I could; then, with you out of the way . . ."

"Hell! If you are speaking the truth!"

"You might prove it if you tried to squeeze the number of that combination out of Norton," Spink suggested lazily, assured of Norton's safety.

"And, by God, I will!" The Scorpion was almost beside himself with rage, so much so that Spink felt peculiarly safe in baiting him. "That was my purpose in enticing you here, more than the actual killing of you. You have been sticking too close to him. Now, with you out of the way, I'll get him. I impersonated you before; I intend doing it again. But first you shall learn what my type of squeezing means."

He strode quickly across the room to where the scorpion he had hurled at Spink had crawled into a corner. Picking it up with his gloved hand, he returned to the helpless detective, remarking savagely: "You were more than necessarily terrified of this scorpion, my friend. It hasn't been treated with the special poison Dr. Gleason discovered, and without it one of them couldn't kill you . . . or do you much permanent harm in fact. But you would have felt the effects of its own venom, deadly numbing. Try it!"

For a moment Spink's heart almost failed him, as the murderer put the scorpion on his wrist. Then, convinced that The Scorpion believed his falsehoods, his indomitable courage returned. The Scorpion would be afraid to kill him before he had ascertained the truth of his statements, and that he could not do, with Norton out of the way. He remained unflinching while the scorpion gripped his wrist with its tenacious claws; watched it, fascinated, as it quickly doubled its back, and seized the flesh above its head with

the pincer-like grip of its flexible tail. Quite perceptibly, though his arms were losing already their sensation from the tight cords binding his wrists, he felt the nauseating numbness which came from the reptile's venom. He listened to his tormentor as he continued: "One of them won't kill, but they can kill by repetition and increasing numbers. You will not find the torture very exquisite, but you will suffer it until you have revealed what I want to know. By that time you will be praying for the end. If I don't get the information I want from Norton, you will do well to decide to give it to me by the time I return."

He went to the door and called softly. Almost immediately Li Ying Hua, his head bandaged, and Ho Ling came in. The former expressed surprise at seeing Spink still alive, and held his knife ready in his hand as he gazed at him with virulent hatred. In a few sentences, however, The Scorpion told him of the necessity of keeping him alive for a time. Acting on The Scorpion's instructions, Ho Ling went to fetch a gag and a coarse sack. With the latter they enveloped the detective's head. As The Scorpion and Li Ying Hua carried him, Spink soon became conscious of the dampness of the tunnels. His heart beat quicker again as they negotiated the door which would open only half way . . . his first indication of their destination. His hopes were fully realized as they removed the sack, and, by the light of their lanterns, he saw they were in the cellar of the warehouse.

They took the extra precaution of binding him to one of the uprights supporting the floor of the warehouse. Afterwards The Scorpion brought a glass-covered box from a cor-

ner of the basement. As he held it in front of the detective's eyes Spink saw that it was literally alive with scorpions.

"Just in case you should imagine I am likely to run out of scorpions," The Scorpion explained the gesture. "I shall need one of them tonight, however, in my pleasant interview with Norton. It will be more effective than the one I used to frighten you."

To Li Ying Hua, he added: "You had better come back with me. Ho Ling can come presently to keep our friend Spink company."



THE SCORPION

CHAPTER XX

THE IDENTITY OF THE SCORPION



CHAPTER XX

THE IDENTITY OF THE SCORPION

SPINK had much to occupy his mind as he remained in the dark cellar, listening to the wash of the river against the wharf outside. Mainly his thoughts centered on the personality of his captor. He knew who he was, unless every faculty had deceived him. There was that strange intonation of the voice, more pronounced as The Scorpion had become more agitated and less guarded in his speech. That, and more. If his suspicions were correct! It was the stupendous incredibility of the fact that made him still the prey of doubts. If they were correct, and should a miscarriage of his plans occur, he knew he would not have a ghost of a chance for his life. Criminals like Li Ying Hua and Ho Ling he could well understand, but this other one, if there was no foundation for his doubts, was the most daring criminal in the whole of London . . . the whole of the world, for that matter.

In his heart, however, he knew he was right, for there was only one person who could have given such intimate detail of his own movements, and that one could quite easily impersonate him to advantage. Knowing who he was, many things became clear which had been hidden in obscurity

before. He became afraid of a miscarriage, not so much for his own safety now, as for the production of sufficient red-handed evidence to convince an outside person.

Luckily, as he considered the matter, he could conceive of but one possibility of such a miscarriage. That was the introduction of the second Chinaman, Ho Ling. Presently Ho Ling would come to the warehouse, but how soon? He was sure The Scorpion would not delay long in sending him, even though he had trussed him up in a manner that made escape absolutely impossible. He would count on the gibes of Ho Ling — fortunately it was not Li Ying Hua who was coming, though Ho Ling would not be much better company — to reduce him, Spink, to a state of mind which would make disclosure of what he wanted to know, and thought he could learn, a foregone conclusion. And Ho Ling's coming involved two chances. He might return before Conway and Carruthers reached the cellar, or, coming close enough behind them to perceive them, he might be able to warn The Scorpion in time for him to escape.

Better the second alternative than the first, Spink thought. In case of an alarm, such as the blundering of the other two into the cellar without being warned of the presence of the Chinaman, Ho Ling might have received instructions to finish him before making his own getaway, possibly by some means of escape which they had not discovered. The criminals would not have left this end of their lair so incomplete as to furnish a trap for themselves. But even at that, Spink felt glad again that it would be Ho Ling, and not Li Ying Hua, who had a distinct grudge against him per-

sonally. With him — remembering the grinning, evil face of the proprietor of the joint, and The Scorpion's principal accomplice — he knew he could expect no mercy. Ho Ling might be persuaded to save himself by turning Crown Evidence, but not Li Ying Hua, who was probably the actual murderer of Kwong Heisu, for, though The Scorpion had boasted that he himself had removed the High Priest of Buddha of the Scorpions, Kwong Heisu had been slain with a knife.

The minutes seemed to drag like hours as he listened for the footfalls which would indicate the proximity of Ho Ling or his own friends. Straining his ears to catch the faintest sound, it came as a shock to him to realize that the first he heard was the closing of the trap in the floor of the passage above the shelf. Unable to penetrate the blackness — so intense that his smarting eyes, though becoming accustomed to it, could perceive nothing — he felt rather than heard the other presence or presences in the cellar with him. One moment of such suspense was enough to bring beads of perspiration on his forehead, until it occurred to him that Ho Ling would not have come without a light, in case of a trap. It was not much more than a moment before the sudden flash of a torch revealed the outline of Carruthers, who was standing a little in advance of Conway.

Another moment, and they were beside him, removing the gag from his mouth first, thus enabling him to breathe: "Thank God it is you!" He added immediately: "Quick! Better put the gag back. Ho Ling is coming . . . will be here any minute!"

"Ho Ling?"

"Yes; a second Chinaman working with Li Ying Hua."

"We only saw two, the masked figure and one Chinaman."

"That was Li Ying Hua. But Ho Ling is coming to keep guard over me. You might not catch him as he drops through the trap, if he comes that way. If he is carrying a lantern, as he probably will, it will be better for him to find me as the others left me. If you hide somewhere, you can take him by surprise when he crosses the cellar to me. But be quick! I hope he didn't see you coming."

"Not likely," Carruthers replied. "As a matter of fact, we used the torch but once. After we passed the branch, we knew we had only to feel our way ahead to the door. There was no sign of a light approaching as we slid through, and we were of course in absolute darkness."

They replaced the gag, but less tightly. Barely had they hidden themselves when the light of Ho Ling's lantern shone through the trap.

Evidently no suspicion of danger had crossed his mind. He carried the lantern straight to Spink. He kicked the helpless detective before he set the lantern on a crate, chuckling mirthfully the while. Then, spitting at him, he stopped his cackling to hiss: "English pig! P'laps you likee smoke pipe now, eh? Ho — ho!"

His laughter ended in a squeal of fright. Conway had stepped from behind a bale where he had crouched, echoing the Chinaman's "Ho — ho!"

Ho Ling spun on his heel, and found himself covered by guns on each side.

"One more squeak out of you, and I let the daylight in!" Conway admonished him. "Get your hands up, you dirty heathen, or I'll drill a hole right through you!"

Quaking with terror, the Chinaman took no chances. His hands were high above his head before Conway had finished speaking.

"Hold him like this until I get the ropes and gag," Conway said to Carruthers. "If he makes any move, shoot!"

In a minute or two Spink was released, Conway remarking to him while he was busy with the ropes: "You look somewhat of a mess, old man. If I hadn't seen you made up before I should not have believed it was you. What happened?"

Quickly, Spink recounted what he had done. He finished: "I thought this make-up necessary for me to get into Li's house without question from outside. As it happened, it proved to be a lucky one. It supplied colour to my subterfuge with The Scorpion. By the way, Conway," Spink loosened a thunderbolt, "I'm pretty sure I know the identity of our Scorpion!"

"Who is he?" Conway was eager.

"Dalgleish!"

"*Dalgleish?*" Conway's voice was incredulous.

"Yes," Spink said quietly. "I was fairly sure before they landed me here, and, though you were not long coming, I suppose, it gave me time to piece things together. His voice gave him away at first, though he tried to conceal it after, until he became excited. That mask he wears has a gauze strip, which explains how he could see through the mask

while driving a car at a high speed. I could see his eyes through it, but not well enough to recognize them. The main thing to confirm my suspicions, after he had told me of his intimate knowledge of my movements, was the fact that he knew Kwong Heisu was found, and of our journey to Gravesend to identify him. The fact of Kwong Heisu's identification has not been made public, and we three, outside of Kent County Police, are the only persons that know Norton recognized the High Priest.

"And then every other fact all along. It was Dalglish who took me to Li's for the purpose of seeing the typewriter. He probably had that letter ready for mailing before, knowing that move was in his mind. It was his suggestion, after his efforts to inculcate Beauchamp were defeated, that I should continue to hunt for Kwong Heisu, intriguing to get me here because I was in his way. His impersonation of me! There was only one other person, outside of the three remaining partners, who could have become so speedily acquainted with my interest in the case. That was Dr. Gleason. His movements looked suspicious for a time, until I concluded that there had been no need for him to show himself at Beauchamp's at all, when Brimmer was killed, if it was he, with his knowledge of poisons, who was committing the murders.

"Then again," he continued, "his efforts at pumping me were not because he suspected some other material motive, but to discover if I knew about the diamond. My presence in Chancery Lane gave him the answer to that. It was probably he who sent the Metropolitan constable to ascertain

if the street hawker stationed on the kerb was I in disguise. Further, Sir Basil Coyne's remarks to me seem now to have implied that he suspected Dalglish was not acting quite on the square, though of course he could have no idea of the extent of his duplicity."

"Incredible as it is, it sounds plausible enough as you reason it out, Spink," Conway commented. He added: "But to convince Sir Basil Coyne of the actual fact, we certainly need to catch The Scorpion red-handed."

"Yes," Spink said. "I nearly made a fool break when I was fairly sure I recognized him, and that was to tell him as much."

A silence followed, until Carruthers said: "This diamond you mention? I hope I haven't been listening in on anything I was not supposed to hear."

"Not at all," Spink replied quickly. "I have so far accepted you as one of us, Mr. Carruthers, that I forgot you were not already in our full confidence. My apologies. These are the particulars, unknown to every one at Scotland Yard except Inspector Dalglish. They explain more fully our initial desire to work our separate campaign."

"That's under my hat for keeps," the engineer said with sincerity when Spink had finished telling him of the 'Light of Buddha'. "I am glad you feel you can let me share so weighty a secret."

"We should hardly be showing our appreciation of your valuable assistance if we didn't," Spink returned cordially.

"Are you sure The Scorpion . . . we had better continue calling him that until your suspicions are confirmed . . . It

would be awful if The Scorpion, say, had the temerity to make you think he was Dalglish to foster further confusion, wouldn't it? What I was going to ask is, do you think The Scorpion actually went to Norton?" Conway asked his partner.

"There's no doubt about it," Spink answered. "That was another lucky move, getting Norton safely under Jessop's care at the Langham. The Scorpion was too confident. He dropped his sleuthing a little too soon. He . . ."

He stopped abruptly, a startled expression coming into his eyes. He sprang to his feet, his fists clenched. "Damn!" he ejaculated. "I had forgotten Peters!"

"Peters?"

"Norton's man. If The Scorpion goes there, impersonating me, Peters will let him in. He'll get Peters for sure, especially if he stops to carry out his usual search for the missing information."

"He didn't get Sedgwick," Conway observed.

"It wasn't necessary. Sedgwick was covered by Brimmer being there. But he got Tomkins."

"Then you think Tomkins didn't commit suicide?"

"I have thought all along," Spink answered. "And that is another point in favour of my suspicions of Dalglish. Tomkins, in some way, showed him that he recognized him as the person who had hypnotized him, and had murdered Anthony. He started remembering after hearing Dalglish speak. Sir Basil suggested that such a thing would be too spectacular to believe. It wasn't for the sake of being spectacular at all. Tomkins had to be got rid of. He was on the

point of revealing what he knew when he died. And his death gave The Scorpion the opportunity of throwing suspicion on the servants as accomplices. I wouldn't give a farthing for Peter's chances of life right now."

"It's a terrible situation!" Conway ejaculated. "But what can be done?"

"Something *must* be done . . . if it isn't too late," Spink groaned. "Protecting Norton, I have placed Peters directly in the murderer's hands. It's a risk, but even to lose The Scorpion I've got to try it," he added, as an idea occurred to him.

"Try what?" Conway queried.

"To get to the nearest telephone before The Scorpion reaches Ealing, and warn Peters," Spink answered. "I called him in Norton's name before, and can do so again."

"The risk, I take it, is if The Scorpion intercepts the message, and becomes suspicious if you don't tell him where you, as Norton, are supposed to be," Conway observed.

"That, and another," Spink replied. "That is if Peters is really an accomplice. In that case The Scorpion will wonder why he is being warned. It will have to be done, nevertheless."

"There are telephone instruments all along the sewers at manholes," Carruthers said. "The nearest one would be that at the south end of the Causeway, where Canton Street joins. You can get plugged through to Central at the tool warehouse. If there's no one there, the plug should be already in. Smith will know."

Early in their conversation they had made Ho Ling secure. Leaving Conway and Carruthers with him, in another minute Spink was stumbling hurriedly along the tunnel in the darkness, using a torch very occasionally until he had passed the branch tunnels and was close to the head of the steps. Thanks to the pulley arrangement, he was able to open the stone door into the sewer quite easily. Smith was standing just inside, and nearly made a fatal mistake. In his anxiety for Peters, Spink had forgotten his disguise, and Smith threatened with his gun the disreputable individual who burst through the door. The gang foreman was not free from excitement himself, and was prepared to take no chances.

"I'm Spink," the detective said hastily, showing his badge. "I had to get into the house above in disguise. Mr. Carruthers said there is a telephone at the Causeway end of Canton Street. Is it plugged through at the tool shed?"

"Sure, sir," Smith answered. "I put the plug in before I came down. Last thing I always do. It wouldn't do to be trapped down here by a cavein, without the means of letting someone know where you were. I'll come with you if you like."

"No, you stay here," Spink said. "I'll find the phone."

He hurried along the footwalk of the sewer. Smith had had two lanterns with him, and Spink borrowed one of them as being more useful than a torch. The plug was in at the tool warehouse, and Central answered immediately he took down the receiver. He requested Norton's number.

"Hullo!" came a voice at the other end.

"Mr. Norton speaking," Spink said. "Is that Peters?"

"No, this is Spink," was the surprising answer, which, however, the detective half expected. But his heart sank with a thump. Undoubtedly he was already too late. "I want to see you," The Scorpion continued. "Where are you?"

Spink's answer must have been as surprising to The Scorpion, "I'll be where you left me . . . safe from The Scorpion," he said, grimly conscious of the double meaning that could be construed into his words. "Meanwhile, I'll speak to Peters."

There was no reply. Spink's heart sank still farther as he heard the click of the replaced receiver at Norton's home.

He had taken the risk and had failed . . . failed to be in time to warn Peters. And he had told The Scorpion enough for him to know that the real Spink had spirited Norton out of his reach before going himself to Limehouse. How far would his suspicions be aroused? That was the momentous question. Would he realize that the danger of a trap might await him in Limehouse, and not return, telephoning perhaps to Li Ying Hua to complete what he had intended doing himself? If so, The Scorpion would escape, and perhaps destroy for ever the opportunity of catching him. Captured, Li Ying Hua might squeal; yet it was doubtful if even he knew The Scorpion's real identity. There was but one chance that the latter might still be caught with the mask and gloves upon him, and that chance was very remote.

Meanwhile, The Scorpion had called Central.

"That phone call that just came through . . . where was it from?" he asked.

"Department of Public Works, Sewers Department," the operator told him.

"Head office?"

"No. From the sewers below Limehouse."

"Can you get them back?"

"Sorry. The line's busy again."

"Where are they calling now?"

"Say, what do you think I am?" came the sarcastic answer. "If you know anything at all, you know that is information I'm not allowed to give you. Ring your caller back presently, and ask him yourself!"

The Scorpion slammed the receiver, rapping out an oath. It was too late to say to Central what he should have said before for it to be convincing. In some way he was being tricked, and he could not understand where. Norton in the sewers below Limehouse . . . left there by Spink! What was the meaning of that? What was he doing there? Was he trying to find that secret entrance in the wall? That was not like Norton. But if he was . . . why? Had he observed something . . . he, or Spink . . . when they viewed that decaying body at Gravesend, to indicate that Kwong Heisu had entered the river via the sewer? It was inconceivable that the secret entrance had already been found. Besides, there hadn't been time. Just the same, Norton's presence in the sewer was puzzling, especially if he knew that Spink was essaying an entrance into the house of Li Ying Hua at the same time. Yet that again was incredible,

for Norton had expressed no surprise at finding Spink in his own house. He might think that Spink had placed him there so that he might trap him, The Scorpion, at Norton's house. In which case he had been a fool to shut the receiver down so hurriedly. That was a fool thing to have done. He could have called for Peters, and then have pretended to be he. That was really the thought that prompted him to ask Central to call back the number, and make some excuse to Norton about accidentally catching the lever.

More important still, to what place was Norton phoning now?

Glancing at the inert body of Peters, clutching with dead hand a scorpion at his throat, the murderer realized that he would have to act quickly. There was no time to continue the search he had just begun. To be found in the house alone with the dead man . . . if, as he believed, Spink had begun to suspect . . . was in itself damnatory evidence, especially as he had been in the house when Tomkins died in a similar way. He might ring Scotland Yard for assistance, and start another wild goose chase himself, but, at this, the first sign of defeat, his bold effrontery was deserting him.

There had been something too pointed for comfort in the remarks made by Sir Basil Coyne about the unsolved mysteries. Was the Chief himself becoming suspicious? It was quite possible he had other agencies working behind his back. There may have been something Sir Basil said in that quiet conversation he had had with Spink on the day of the inquest! If Spink had discovered anything, he must be got rid of at any cost.

He almost touched the receiver to call Li Ying Hua, to give him instructions to despatch Spink with all speed. Two thoughts stopped him in time. He had no code which would be unintelligible to a possible listener-in at Central by which he could deliver such an incriminating message. The second thought was of greater moment. He had come almost to the end of his tether when his Chinese accomplice had brought the coming of Kwong Heisu to his notice, with the possibility of great loot of some description in sight. He had thought to obtain that loot before making his exit from official circles. Besides which, the later description by Li Ying Hua of the 'Light of Buddha' had aroused in him an insatiable covetousness. That diamond must be his at any price. To have Spink murdered at once by the Chinaman might destroy for ever his chances of getting it, even if he could bluff other matters through. Better to go back to Limehouse, take the risk of capturing Norton in the sewer, and force the secret of that box combination from either by torturing both together. He had run many comparatively great risks already. This one, too, might contain his only chance to fight for his life and escape.

He left the apartment quickly, jumped into his waiting car, and stepped on the starter. The mask and gloves he had stuffed into his pockets. He had brought them with him . . the mask at least unnecessarily this time. But he would need it to terrorize Norton when he encountered him below ground in the sewer. He headed his powerful car straight for Limehouse.

Five minutes after his exit, a police car with four officers

pulled up at the Lorraine Apartments. The second call Spink had put through was to South Ealing, the nearest police barracks to Ealing Broadway. Had The Scorpion stated his connection with Scotland Yard, his purpose would have been defeated, for Spink, though using a different name in case of accidents, had stated his authority from Scotland Yard, warning the operator at Central to secrecy.

"Conway, of Spink and Conway, Private Detectives, speaking," he told the desk sergeant on duty. "We are investigating those scorpion murders. Get some men as quickly as you can to No. 4 Lorraine Apartments, Ealing Broadway."

"What's the idea?" the sergeant queried sharply. He disliked taking orders of that description, especially from private agents.

"I've good reason to think another scorpion murder has just been committed there."

"You have, eh? What's the reason?"

"The murderer impersonated Spink before when he killed Brimmer in Brondesbury. I just rang Norton's house and he answered, saying he was Spink."

"Who's Norton?"

"A partner of Brimmer's."

"How do you know it wasn't Spink talking to you?"

Spink fumed at the delay caused by the sergeant's questions, but he managed to keep his annoyance from his voice.

"Because Spink is a prisoner down here in Limehouse somewhere," Spink said. "They kidnapped him to get him away from Norton."

"Then where are you?"

"In the sewer beneath Limehouse, under Canton Street."

"What the . . . !" the sergeant began.

"Say," Spink interrupted him. "If your men find anything at the Lorraine Apartments, send them down here in about fifteen minutes. There's a chance the murderer may come back, and we want to give him time. Instruct them to break into No. 397 Canton Street . . . that's off the lower end of Limehouse Causeway. From a room inside, with a typewriter in it, there's a secret door into the Limehouse tunnels. Tell them to find it, if they have to smash everything, and push into the tunnels. And say, can you arrange to have a police boat without lights patrolling the river off the warehouses behind Canton Street? You had better ring Deptford for the boat. Tell the officer in charge to act on a police whistle."

"Say, fellow!" the sergeant expostulated. "What d'you think we are? Scotland Yard?"

"No. I'm giving you instructions on behalf of Scotland Yard. We've got full authority in this case. Ring Sir Basil Coyne, Scotland Yard's Chief, if you doubt it; but don't ring anyone else there. Tell Sir Basil Coyne what I've said."

"And who are you again?"

"Spink and Conway," Spink repeated, with emphasis on his own name, as the most important for the sergeant to remember.

"All right. I get you!" the sergeant said. "I'll phone the river police about the boat, too."

Instead, in the usual police manner, he stopped to verify Spink's authority first. Sir Basil Coyne's vehemence roused him out of his torpor.

"Have you sent those men to the Lorraine Apartments?" he asked him.

"No sir; I . . ." was as far as the sergeant got in explanation of the delay.

"Then you had better be damned quick about it!" the Head of Scotland Yard exploded. "I'll look after the river police myself."

Back in the tunnels and warehouse, Spink bestowed his forces to what he considered the best advantage. First, he took Smith with him into the tunnels, removing the rope and pulley from the inside of the stone door, so that escape could not be effected that way. Afterwards, he and Smith remained in the cellar of the warehouse, while Conway and Carruthers remained concealed along the passage on the opposite side of the warehouse tunnel to that leading to Li Ying Hua's.

They had not long to wait for developments. The Scorpion had returned direct to his Chinese accomplice, insane with rage and defeat. Even Li cowered before his malevolent gestures.

"We've been fooled by Spink!" The Scorpion hissed savagely. "He hid Norton in the sewer. Quick! We've got to get him first; then we'll deal with Spink!"

"Why hamper yourself with the mask, Master?" Li remonstrated, as The Scorpion was struggling into it.

"Fool!" the Master hissed again. "It is the symbol that

will terrorize him. Besides, there may be others in the sewer, and I mustn't be recognized."

Li followed him into the tunnel. In his perturbation at what The Scorpion had said, he neglected to see that the door was properly closed. They hurried along the tunnel, with flaring lanterns, and turned at the junction towards the sewer steps. At the top of them The Scorpion halted, and pointed with wildly gesticulating hand. The absence of the rope and pulley warned him that he was in a trap.

"Back!" he exclaimed savagely. "Back to the house!"

"Why not the warehouse?" Li Ying Hua questioned.

"They have probably taken Ho Ling, and are waiting for us," The Scorpion answered. "Hell!" he muttered to himself, hazarding a correct guess. "I might have known that was Spink talking to me!"

Waiting for them to proceed along the tunnel to the warehouse, their sudden backward turn in the direction they had come took Conway and Carruthers by surprise. They started from the depths of their hiding-place, but had not taken many steps when The Scorpion and Li Ying Hua went flying past along the straight tunnel. The doubts of the police sergeant at South Ealing had had one fortunate effect. Hearing Sir Basil Coyne speak in the manner he did, the sergeant had exerted an effort to make up for lost time, by despatching a contingent of men to Limehouse without waiting for the report from the Lorraine Apartments. His men had arrived almost on The Scorpion's heels, and, finding the secret door ajar, had rushed straight

through, impetuously towards the glimmer of light they could see.

They were close behind Conway and Carruthers as they took up the chase, guided by the light of the lanterns the fugitives still carried, and anxious not to be too far behind when the criminals reached the cellar. There, there would be only two men against two, and the hunted ones were murderously desperate.

The police and they crashed in a body at the door which opened but half way. There was too much risk in trying to negotiate it singly, with two dangerous criminals on the other side . . . perhaps waiting. The door fell before them in splinters, and, by the light of a torch, they looked upon an empty passage.

The floor might have opened and swallowed the fugitives. It was incredible that they had got through the trap so quickly. Below, however, they could immediately hear the noise of violent hammering.

Lifting the trap hastily, Conway dropped through. Spink and Smith were endeavouring to break through the door at the top of the cellar steps leading to the warehouse above.

"There must have been another door," Spink shouted to them. "We heard them pass overhead. Damn! They'll get through the warehouse door on to the wharf!"

As fast as they could drop through, the constables joined in the attack on the door. In a minute it gave, and they climbed to the floor of the warehouse. The outer door was wide open.

On the wharf, as they stood and listened, they could discern the distant splashing of oars. A boat had been moored to the wharf. A policeman found the severed painter which the fugitives had cut. As yet there was no sign of the patrol boat for which Spink anxiously hoped.

"They are making for the other side," the sergeant in charge observed, after they had listened silently for another moment or two. "We'll have to find boats."

"If the launch arrives in time, we can catch them before they reach the other side," Spink replied. "Do you know if my instructions were carried out?"

"I couldn't say," the sergeant answered. "We were told to get to Limehouse as quickly as we could."

"It may be a ruse to get us on the water, then they'll double back to this side," Conway remarked.

"Yes, I thought of that," Spink returned. To the sergeant he said: "Crowd your men along the waterfront to stop them from landing. If they don't come in, and you can find a launch of some kind, go right after them!"

"Conway," he said, after another minute's impatient fuming, "you and Smith beat it to some of those other wharves up the river. You may find a launch up there."

Two more minutes, which seemed hours, passed. Then to Spink's ears came the faint chug of a motor launch. It was coming rapidly down the river towards him. As soon as he thought it could be heard, he blew a shrill blast on a police whistle, which he had borrowed from one of the constables. Instantly the search-light of the patrol boat swept the river until it picked him up on the wharf. He beckoned,

waving his arms frantically. The boat swung towards the wharf.

"Which way?" the officer in charge asked him, as he scrambled aboard. Spink pointed in the direction in which he had last heard the sound of oars. The boat gathered speed again quickly as it swung out across the river, its beam stroking the glittering water.

"Come back here, Spink! I want to talk to you," a voice called to him from the stern of the launch. Looking back, he was astonished to see Sir Basil Coyne sitting there. He went to him quickly.

"You are surprised to see me," Sir Basil stated a fact.

"I am, sir."

"Your message was relayed to me from South Ealing," the Chief said. "I am glad you used the authority I gave you, Spink, but why didn't you communicate with me direct?"

"South Ealing is nearer to Ealing Broadway than Scotland Yard is," Spink answered. "I didn't want to waste time, sir. I had phoned the Lorraine Apartments, where Norton lives, and The Scorpion was there."

"The Scorpion?"

"That's what we call him," Spink said. "I came down to Limehouse on his trail, and let myself into a trap, for which however, I had made preparations with Conway, an engineer named Carruthers, and a sewer foreman named Smith. I had got Norton safely out of his way first, but I had forgotten Norton's valet, Peters. Before leaving me trussed up in a warehouse back there, The Scorpion told

me he was going for Norton, impersonating me again. Then I thought of Peters. I am afraid, sir, that The Scorpion got him."

"Then you saw him?" the Chief's question was eager.

"In his mask, sir."

"But his voice! He was speaking to you. Did you recognize that?"

"I . . have my suspicions," Spink said, hesitatingly. Then, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, he added: "I am afraid you are in for a shock, sir. It is Dalglish!"

"Ah!" Sir Basil breathed, but not with the amazement Spink had expected. The Chief added: "That is why I came myself, Spink. I suspected something like that . . not without reason. He had too many unsolved mysteries on his hands . . mysteries that appeared to be protected by graft, if not worse. And . . I never thought for a moment that that other valet, Tomkins, committed suicide like that. No sane man could think it. I helped put the mask over his face . . to catch him. I couldn't very well do that myself, but I was sure you could."

"I am not sure, of course, sir," Spink hazarded.

"We shall soon know," Sir Basil replied. "Look! There's a boat, with two men rowing. They must be our men. If we are wrong, Spink, this is strictly between ourselves."

The searchlight had picked up the rowboat, and the officer opened his siren to challenge them to halt. In less than a minute he would overtake them.

"God! They're fighting!" Sir Basil exclaimed angrily.

That was indeed the unexpected thing that was happen-

ing . . fighting with knives. The patrol officer opened the throttle wide, to overtake them before they could do material damage to each other. But before they reached the row-boat, both men were lying in the bottom, stabbed!

One, wearing The Scorpion's mask, was dead. The other was scarcely breathing. That other was Li Ying Hua. He raised himself feebly. He could just speak as they bent over the boat.

"The traitor!" he sobbed. "He wanted to kill me . . before you caught us . . when the light came on. Then he could . . throw away the mask . . say he caught me. But . . I got him . . too! Inspector Dal.....!"

The Chinaman's voice trailed to a whisper as he subsided beside his accomplice, dead with him.

"There are some things I can understand, but this is a mystery to me. What did Dalgleish expect to get out of this . . sufficient, I mean, to cover those atrocious murders?"

It was Sir Basil Coyne speaking. He and Spink were standing on the wharf, aside from Conway, Carruthers and Smith. The Chief had thanked these latter for their services, and had drawn Spink aside to ask the question. The police had taken charge of the bodies, to convey them to Scotland Yard.

"There was truth in the story about the jewels they purloined from the temple of Buddha of the Scorpions," Spink answered, after a moment's hesitation. "Kwong Heisu was under the impression that some of tremendous value had not been disposed of."

"And had they?"

"Most of them, sir," Spink answered vaguely.

He was relieved when the Chief said quietly: "Well, Spink, the jewels now don't concern me. They were more or less the spoils of war, anyway, and they have not been requested by any authority in China. So far as I am concerned, I hope they don't cause any more trouble. Good-night . . . Inspector!"

"But . . . sir!" Spink would have expostulated.

"Take over Dalglish's office in the morning," the Chief went on, smiling away his objections. "If it's your partnership with Conway you are thinking of, bring him along as your Chief Assistant!"

THE END.

